

Her Pauper Knight

SHIRLEY BRANDER



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by

SHIRLEY BRANDER



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CHAPTER I

JIMMIE DIGGS, veteran reporter for the *Evening Chronicle*, entered the gates of Wyndham Manor with a "This rock shall fly from its firm base" expression.

He eyed the caretaker's lodge warily and started on a soft dog trot in the general direction of the Manor turrets. His dog trot had progressed exactly eight steps when a horny hand reached out and whirled him around facing the exit. Ladd, the caretaker said, "Beat it."

"Aw, look," Jimmie said, "it can't do any harm for me to interview Miss Wyndham."

"Miss Wyndham never gives interviews," Ladd said. "I throwed you out once an' I will again."

"See here, foxy grandpa . . . I gotta get a story. I been ordered to get a story." This was a bare-faced lie. Jimmie Diggs had a hunch, and he was playing it on his own.

"I got nothing to do with your orders," Ladd said. "I'm 'tendin' my own. I been ordered to keep reporters out."

"I'll lose my job," Diggs said, in a burst of inspiration.

"I got nothin' to do with that, either," Ladd said.

"Doesn't the *visitor* want to be interviewed?"

Ladd shot him a wary glance. There was a short pause. "What visitor?" he said.

"You know Miss Wyndham's got a visitor," Jimmie wheedled.

"I don't know nothing except that I got other things to do than stand here gassing with you."

"Is she going to get married?"

"Is who going to get married?"

"Iris Wyndham."

"Think you're pumping me, don't you? I don't know. A pretty girl like Miss Wyndham'll get married sometime." Ladd looked mildly triumphant. He guessed he was a match for these wisecracking reporters. He'd handled plenty of them. When a fellow had been gatekeeper for Anthony Wyndham's estate for twenty years, he learned a thing or two about handling reporters.

"Is she going to marry this . . . this visitor?"

"There ain't no visitor. Now get along."

Jimmie sighed a deceitful sigh and walked slowly beside him. "Funny how these rich folks hate publicity," he said. "Gee, I could give them a swell spread. Honest. Just think of a half-page portrait of Iris Wyndham, heiress to millions, daughter of Anthony Wyndham, the per-

fume king, with an insert of that castle on the other page . . . tellin' about how she's going to marry an Earl or a Prince, or something like that."

"Who said she was goin' to marry him?" Ladd bridled.

"Nobody," Jimmie said hastily. "I just thought as long as he was visiting here, maybe it meant something."

"We've had lots of visitors . . ." Ladd turned a deep purple. "Say," he bellowed, "who said anybody was visitin' here? Tell me that. Who said . . ."

"Nobody," Jimmie said mildly. He puckered his lips and whistled aimlessly. So there *was* a member of the nobility visiting Wyndham Manor.

He stopped at the door of the lodge and handed Ladd a cigar. "No offense meant," he said jauntily. "None taken, I hope."

"Well, don't try it again," Ladd said, in a milder tone.

Jimmie walked slowly toward the gate. When the door closed behind Ladd, he whirled and streaked up the drive. Ladd came bellowing from the door of the lodge. His bellows attracted the attention of the assistant groom, who was half-way up the drive. The groom tackled Jimmie and threw him. Jimmie struggled to his feet and disentangled himself. The groom tackled him again from behind. Ladd's lusty

bellows brought the head groom and the assistant gardener running.

Desperately, Jimmie grasped his assailant by the right arm and the waist and threw him to the ground. He put his head down and started running again. The assistant groom lay where Jimmie had thrown him, holding his shoulder, his face twisted with pain wrinkles.

Jimmie Diggs hit something solid on his fourth bound. Craig, the assistant gardener, put out a pair of steel arms and checked Jimmie's progress. "Where to, big boy?" he asked pleasantly.

"Aw, for cripe's sake," Jimmie gasped, struggling in Craig's grasp, "do I have to knock down the whole damn Marine corps to get to Iris Wyndham?"

"We have the navy in reserve," Craig said. "Come out to the gate quietly, my boy, or we'll carry you out feet first."

"Listen to reason, won't you?"

"Save your breath. You're leaving, see?"

"What a break," Jimmie moaned. "What a break! Why couldn't you have been on an errand in Honolulu or something like that?"

"Why the determination to interview Iris Wyndham?"

"Aw, you know she's got somebody visiting here that'd make a swell Sunday feature. I get seventy bucks for every full page feature I turn in."

"Dig up another lead, my boy. Wyndham Manor's the original fairy castle with the sleeping princess. Not a chance."

Craig ejected Diggs and waved to him through the gate-bars. "Don't go away mad," he said, grinning.

"Have a cigar," said Jimmie, thrusting one through. "At least I've seen a human being on the grounds. I never did before."

"Thanks." Craig stuffed it in his shirt pocket and turned to Ladd. "Here, Pop," he said. "They're not my brand."

He was tall and broad. He had the features and the physique of a Greek god. Even in his blue shirt and earth-stained gray trousers, he stood out as a person of unusual character and poise.

The head groom was cursing. Craig went over to him. "Now what?" he said.

The head groom jerked his thumb in the direction of the assistant groom. "Little Caroline has a wrenched arm," he snorted. He turned to his assistant. "Why don't you take a job nursing kittens? You put me in a swell hole. Miss Wyndham's horse is ordered for eleven o'clock and it isn't curried yet."

"I tell you I'm hurt. I got to see a doctor about this arm."

"You," the head groom said, turning to Craig, "get up to the stable and curry Lady Jane. Make it snappy."

"I?" Craig said.

"Yes, you. Get a move on. What are you standing there for?"

"Because I want to stand here," Craig said.

"I gave you your orders, didn't I?"

"Your mouth was working," Craig said, "but I wasn't listening. I don't take orders from you."

"Who in hades do you think you are?"

"I think I'm the assistant gardener," Craig said. "You can verify it by asking the head gardener. He hired me."

"Are you going to curry that horse or not?"

"Not," Craig said. He fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette, drew it out and lit it leisurely.

"I'll report you to Mr. Wyndham!"

"Dear me," Craig drawled. "In your report, you might mention that I was engaged for the garden and not the stable. If you want the horse curried, do it yourself."

He turned on his heel and went back to the clump of shrubs he had been working on before Ladd's bellows interrupted him.

CHAPTER II

IRIS WYNDHAM had a path worn in the luxurious rug of the living room in her apartment before he was brought before her. Four steps ahead, turn on a little French heel, four steps back. How dared he? How dared any one refuse to groom her horse? She would discharge him. She would turn him from the gate without a reference. She would send him to her father, Anthony Wyndham. Anthony Wyndham knew how to handle difficult servants.

She was tall, but gave the impression of slender fragility. Her shoulders were straight and proud, and in spite of their slenderness, suggested a certain feminine strength. Her eyebrows were black as night, arching high and wide. Imperious eyebrows shading large gray eyes which were cold as fog at times, and warm as her heart at others. She wore a green negligee.

Her maid stepped in and announced that the assistant gardener was outside. Iris said, "Send him in."

He came and stood just inside the door. So this was his copper-haired mistress. Gad, how few women knew enough to wear things in soft

shades of green when they had red hair! He smiled pleasantly.

Iris was trembling with fury. "You are the assistant gardener?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Wyndham."

"I understand that you were ordered to groom my horse and refused."

"Yes, Miss Wyndham."

"Why did you refuse?"

"I was not hired to groom horses."

"You were hired to obey orders, were you not?"

"Orders which have to do with the gardens," he said.

"Suppose I ordered you to go now . . . at once . . . and groom Lady Jane?"

"I am sorry," he said with gentle insistence, "but I would be forced to repeat my statement. I was hired as assistant gardener."

"You are subjecting yourself to dismissal, do you realize that?"

"One is always subject to dismissal," Craig said.

"You have been deliberately insolent and insubordinate."

"I am forced to disagree," Craig said. "I have merely stated two facts. First, that I was hired for . . ."

"Don't repeat that," she said impatiently. "I've heard it three times already."

"Second, that I will not, under any circumstances, groom your horse."

"Do you mind telling me why?"

"Not at all. Your head groom is an insulting, ignorant and unnecessarily self-important lout. I dislike self-important louts and I will not take orders from them."

"I am not a lout," Iris said. She fought the impulse to smile.

"Indeed you are not," he said. He didn't fight the impulse. He smiled.

"Then why do you refuse *me*?"

"Miss Wyndham," Craig said gently, "I would not refuse your most objectionable request. I would be glad to crawl down the castle steps, one at a time, scrubbing them as I went, if it were necessary to your happiness. On the other hand, if I go now and groom your horse, I have been defeated by your head groom. If I am discharged, I have not been defeated. I have stuck to my point, as every gentleman should. I said that I would not, and I will not, groom your horse."

Iris Wyndham stamped her foot. "You dare to stand there and tell me you will not obey me! You dare! You tell me to, my *face* that you care nothing for my wishes!"

"If you would be happier facing the window," Craig murmured, "I can talk as well, really."

"You are discharged."

"Yes, Miss Wyndham. May I go now?"

"Yes. Get out of my sight. Don't ever let me see you again."

Craig bowed. "I am sorry if I have offended you," he said. "The circumstances are unfortunate."

"Please leave."

"Yes, Miss Wyndham."

She had the feeling, as the door closed behind him, that he was smiling. Further, she had the unshakable conviction that when he reached the foot of the stairs, he would laugh aloud. She thought she was going to cry. Then she thought that she would scream with rage. Worst of all by a common gardener! But *was* he a common gardener? She stopped short in her furious pacing. "Marie!" she said. "*Marie* . . . where are you?"

"Here, mademoiselle," Marie said.

"Run quickly. Tell that man to come back."

"What man, mademoiselle?"

"The man who was just in here! The tall one . . . the handsome one . . . the assistant gardener. Hurry."

Now, she reflected, as the door closed behind Marie, she would have to give her the ivory satin dress she had been coveting for months to make up for her impatience.

She almost regretted her impulse. Why had she sent for him to come back? She hated insolence. Had he been insolent? Of course he had. Because he used good grammar in his insolence it didn't follow that it was not in-

subordination. She had been a fool. She wouldn't see him. She would go down the back staircase. No, she couldn't. Then he would know that she was afraid. She corrected herself. He would *think* she was afraid. Marie came in. "The assistant gardener is outside, Miss Wyndham," she said. "He tells me to tell you his name is Craig."

"Does he think I *care* what his name is?"

Craig, outside the door, smiled. There were scurrying sounds inside. Iris' voice said, "The yellow dress, Marie. Quickly. The one with the old lace."

When Marie admitted him, Iris stood at the window. She turned and regarded him coldly. She wore the yellow dress with old lace at the throat.

She was a princess regarding a serf. Her gold-yellow frock touched the floor in back and swept up over trim little ankles. Her hair was a flaming aureole around her small, pointed white face. A shaft of sunlight caught a red light in her hair and dazzled him. He stood there staring at her. She said: "What are you staring at?"

"Your hair," he said simply. "It is beautiful."

"I have not asked your opinion of my hair."

"You asked me why I was staring."

"Servants have no personal motives for staring," she said.

"You mean they are not supposed to have."

"I mean they have not."

"Perhaps they have, and do not speak of them."

"Did you come in here to continue your insolence?"

"I came in because you sent for me, Miss Wyndham."

"I sent for you to tell you that you are the most impossible, insolent and ill-mannered gardener it has ever been my misfortune to encounter."

"Ah," he said, "then I may go?"

"Not yet. Who are you?"

"I am Craig, the gardener."

"I know that. I mean . . . tell me your background. Where were you educated?"

"Here and there," he said.

"You're a college man." It was a statement rather than an interrogation.

"I read a lot," he said, without moving a muscle of his face. A smile flickered faintly in his eyes and went out.

"Have you always been a gardener?" she demanded.

"Well," Craig said, "I was a baby for a time."

She stamped her foot. "Why do you not answer?"

"But I *am* answering," he said, spreading out bewildered hands.

"You evade."

"Everybody evades," he said.

"You seem to be answering directly, but you are actually throwing my questions back in my face."

"I do not mean to," he said earnestly.

"What are your ambitions? Do you want to make gardening your future?"

"I shall always garden," he said. "Shrubs and flowers do not ask questions or make conversation."

"You mean that you resent my interest."

"Is it interest or curiosity?"

"A little of both." She sat down and regarded him reflectively. She did not offer him a chair. He stood in the center of the room. His expression was respectful and interested.

Iris said, "I was very angry at you."

"Yes, Miss Wyndham."

"I am not angry now."

"Thank you."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"What else can I say?"

"In the face of your insolence," she said, "I should think you might find something more."

"I will get down on my knees if it please your highness," Craig said. His expression did not change.

"You are making fun of me."

"Perish the thought."

"You are!" She rose and paced the floor with a little frown puckering her brows. "To think,"

she said, "that I allow you to stand there and make sport of my forgiveness!"

"If you like," he said, "I will retire."

"You will retire when I tell you to."

"Yes, Miss Wyndham." He shifted to one foot and stood there, granite faced.

"Craig!" she whirled around. "Do you understand what it means to maintain discipline on an estate like this?"

"You forget that I am a gardener," Craig said. "How can I understand?"

"Our men must work with us. I do not wish to report you to my father. He would be harsh."

"A rebuke from you," said Craig graciously, "is much easier to take."

"I do not wish to discharge you."

"Thank you, Miss Wyndham."

"I called you back to . . . to ask you to try and remember that we have hundreds of servants. If each one of them followed your example, Wyndham Manor would not uphold its reputation of clocklike routine."

She was glad she had at last found an excuse to explain her summons. She could not explain it to herself.

With a faint smile he said: "I will try to remember."

"You will obey orders at all times."

"I will either obey orders or tender my resignation."

"Men do not tender resignations on the Wyndham estate," she said. "They quit."

"Then I will be ready to quit."

"Why are you so obstinate?"

"There are certain people," Craig said, "who are willing to lose their self-respect by performing duties which are hateful to them. There are others who keep their self-respect by refusing in the face of starvation. I am one of those persons."

"You would never face starvation. You are too sure of yourself."

"Only in certain situations," he said.

"Such as?"

"They are too numerous to waste your time with, Miss Wyndham."

"Had you no higher ambitions than that of gardening when you were in college?"

"I had ambitions at the age of nine," he said.

"Where were you at that time?"

"With my parents."

"I mean . . . are you an American?"

"Of course."

"Native?"

"It is my country," he said.

"You do not wish to tell me where you were born, is that it?"

"You twist my replies into significant meanings," he said. "I am an insignificant person. I dig the soil around your rose-bushes. I would

not presume to inflict my life's history upon you."

"You are a stubborn man."

"I am sorry if I seem stubborn."

"You are difficult and willful."

"I hadn't the proper training, perhaps."

"You were not trained as a servant."

"Servility does not come with training."

"How long have you worked for my father?"

"This is the second month."

"You only say Miss Wyndham when you happen to remember it," she said, with a keen little glance.

"I beg your pardon. This is the second month, Miss Wyndham."

"Never mind. I rather like it. You plan to stay indefinitely?"

"I never make plans, Miss Wyndham. Life is too full of unexpected circumstances."

"But as far as you know, you will be here indefinitely?"

"As far as I know," he said, "I will be here to-morrow. When to-morrow comes, I will decide about the day after to-morrow."

"Are you . . . in love?"

Momentarily, there was a distressed look upon his face. He said: "The head gardener will be looking for me, Miss Wyndham. Your roses . . . your spirea . . . think of *them*, I beg you."

"Very well," she said, "don't answer. It doesn't really matter. I am too curious."

"May I go?"

"Yes, Craig, you may go."

"Thank you," he said. "You have been very kind to take an interest in me, Miss Wyndham."

"I have been very kind not to discharge you for insubordination," she said, with a slight smile. "It is not often I allow an employee to disregard my commands."

"I am honored," Craig said ironically.

"You are unusual," she said. "Go to your roses and spirea."

"Your roses and spirea," Craig said.

"Have it your way. To *my* roses and spirea then, Craig . . . and mind you tend them lovingly."

He closed the door behind him and she sat looking at it. He was obviously no ordinary gardener. He had had an education. He was not ill at ease in the presence of his superiors. She found herself, to her surprise, thinking of him as an equal. She was annoyed with herself. Why should she be interested in the love affairs of a gardener? It was ridiculous. Iris Wyndham, the daughter of the Manor, spending three quarters of an hour interviewing a presumptuous nobody!

Ridiculous! Absurd! Who was he . . . why had he aroused her interest?

CHAPTER III

THE Duke of Athelstan was becoming impatient. Iris was twenty minutes late for their riding appointment. Mrs. Wyndham was entertaining him in the drawing room. At least, Mrs. Wyndham labored under the impression that she was entertaining him. He watched the door anxiously for Iris' entrance.

"Our little girl has so many things to attend to," she murmured. Why didn't Iris come? It was like her to keep the duke waiting. Sometimes Mrs. Wyndham wondered where Iris got her independence. She didn't seem interested in the fact that the scion of one of the oldest houses in England was a guest at Wyndham Manor. The ordinary girl would have been thrilled. Not Iris. She was indifferent, and at times seemed even to forget it.

Mrs. Wyndham felt hard put to it to make conversation sufficiently interesting to keep the duke's attention. "I suppose you've heard the history of Wyndham Manor," she fluttered.

"Something of it, yes. I was agreeably pleased at the prospect of seeing it when I had your message in New York."

"We can't tell you, your highness, how we ap-

preciate your coming. I realize how *many* friends you have in the states, and how you have been swamped with invitations . . . but we were so anxious to return your delightful hospitality in Devonshire. Then, too, I wanted you to see Wyndham Manor. We are *so* proud of it."

"How long has it been in America?"

"Mr. Wyndham's father brought it over, every stick and stone. It had been the dearest dream of his life, and when he amassed a fortune in perfume, the first thing he did was to buy Wyndham Manor back from the . . . well, the distant relatives Anthony Wyndham the first had sold it to."

"One of England's noblest structures transplanted to upper New York State," Athelstan murmured. "You *must* be very proud."

He rose and walked to the French windows. He was tall and gaunt. His cheekbones were sunken. He showed obvious signs of dissipation. His clothes were perfection to the last detail. His blond hair was straight and fine and combed flat to his head, parted in the middle. A small, waxed mustache completed the exterior of the last of the house of Athelstan. He wore a whipcord riding habit and slashed his crop against his boots in mild impatience.

Mrs. Wyndham clenched her small white hands in impotent fury. She was delicately white, with a proud little head poised on a weak replica of Iris' swanlike throat. She was vain and ambitious, given to tears and hysterics when

her desires were not gained by less drastic measures. *Why didn't Iris come?* Oh, what an impossible girl! How could she ever hope for her to make a decent marriage when she flouted every eligible man who approached her?

Mrs. Wyndham rose and walked to the bell rope. She gave it a vicious yank. When she turned, Iris was standing in the doorway. She wore the gold-yellow dress. Mrs. Wyndham gasped, recovered her poise and said sweetly, "Iris, my dear . . . you were riding. Had you forgotten? I was just ringing Bowles to send for you."

"Don't bother, Bowles," Iris said over her shoulder. "Mother was sending for me, and I'm here."

"Thank you, miss." Bowles retired.

"You are not dressed for riding, Iris."

"No, mother. I had forgotten. I'm sorry. Good afternoon, Athelstan."

Athelstan bowed. "You are very beautiful this afternoon, Miss Wyndham."

Iris acknowledged this with a slight inclination of the head. "I'm sorry I forgot," she said. "I . . . I don't want to ride particularly anyway. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. I'll just cut up and change."

"Don't, please. It's an hour and a half before dinner. You'll have time."

"Iris, dear. . . ." Mrs. Wyndham's eyes were cold. Oh, if she could shake her. If she might

only take her over her knee! Why must she be so difficult? She looked at the duke. He was staring at Iris. There was . . . yes, there *was* a look of admiration in his eyes. Perhaps he admired high-handedness. Perhaps Iris was playing a little game of her own. She relaxed. At least he was not angry.

Iris said: "I suppose mother has been enlarging on Wyndham Manor."

"We have been admiring it," Athelstan said.

"People who don't, never get a second invitation," Iris said, sitting down by the French windows. "They endure mother's burlblings about it and escape as soon as possible."

If Mrs. Wyndham's emotions could have been read in her face, her face would have been giving voice to a faint moan. It was her fate to be the mother of an American girl. And *what* an American girl! She forced a smile. "Iris is always laughing at her old mother," she said playfully.

"Nonsense, mother. You're not old . . . and if any one but yourself hinted at it, you'd be at him hammer and tongs. Don't give Athelstan the impression that I'm going around with constant fun pouring from my decorative mouth. He'll go home and write a book about his impression of the modern American girl." She looked at Athelstan. "You all do, don't you?" she said.

"I've no literary aspirations," he said. "It

would be a pleasure to write on such a subject, however. A charming theme indeed."

"Well said," Iris murmured. "The Duke of Athelstan brings old world courtliness to Wyndham Manor. Goodness knows we find little enough of it in our American visitors."

"Iris!" The moan was voiced.

"All right, mother." Iris turned to Athelstan with an impish grin. "I retract," she said. "On my knees, I beg forgiveness. I am a wretch. I should be confined in the tower. Have we a tower, mother? Confine me on bread and water. Give me fifty lashes. I have been guilty of treason. Three rousing cheers for our American visitors. Can you give a tiger, Athelstan?"

"A tiger?" Athelstan said bewilderedly, "but what would you do with it?"

"Not a striped one," Iris said. "I meant the kind of tiger you find in football stands."

"Iris, you are talking nonsense," Mrs. Wyndham said sharply.

"But mother, I *like* to talk nonsense."

Mrs. Wyndham's smile was more than forced. It was dragged, protesting, and placed over her lips as willingly as a cat is forced into the ocean in mid-winter. "Iris darling" (and she meant wretch), "you are being difficult this morning."

"I like to be difficult," Iris said. "It's my sole amusement. I know the faces of the old gentlemen in the gallery by heart. Grandfather Anthony's nose is practically gone. Great Uncle

Symonds has spots on his chin. Something should be done about it, mother. Visitors will think the Wyndhams are chronic measles sufferers. Athelstan, don't you think they're horrible?"

"All ancestral galleries are dull after the first hundred years," he said.

"Heavens," Iris cried, "I'm not a hundred yet!"

"I didn't mean that. I meant . . ."

"Never mind. I hold my age rather well at fifty. I'm not sensitive. I rather like the girl at the end. She looks as though she were bored with it all."

"That's Jane Wyndham," Mrs. Wyndham told Athelstan. "She was the scapegrace of the Wyndhams in Devonshire. She ran away with a penniless painter and starved to death eventually."

"Mother thinks starving to death is romantic," Iris said. "She really died of pneumonia."

"Iris," Mrs. Wyndham said, exasperated, "you know very well that they hadn't money enough to buy her the proper food."

"I know," said Iris, "but many a chicken broth and mint jelly patient has died of pneumonia. What mother's leading up to, Athelstan, is the announcement that I favor Jane. She thinks it's wickedly romantic to have a throwback daughter to the scapegrace of the Wyndhams."

"She was the most beautiful of the Wyndham women," Mrs. Wyndham said.

"She'll have to be," Iris said, keeping a perfectly sober face.

"Iris!"

"To the tower! Call out the guards!"

"Iris . . . sometimes I despair . . ."

"Sometimes?"

"Athelstan will think you insane."

"I am insane, Athelstan," Iris said. "You might as well know the worst."

"I think you are charming."

"I am pretty charming at that," she said. "I've always said I was as charming as I could be under the circumstances. It's a frightful drag having ancestors, don't you think so?"

"A bally nuisance," he agreed.

"What do you think of the labor party, Athelstan?"

"I don't think about it."

"Good. Now you think of something, like—ask me what I think of the modern flapper?"

"What do you think of the modern flapper?"

"I don't. Now we're even."

"Iris," said her mother desperately, "don't you think his highness would enjoy looking at the gardens?"

"It's just a bunch of roses and spirea," Iris said. "Come— Mother! Have you called out the guards?"

Mrs. Wyndham's mouth gaped in agitation. "What on earth is that horrible noise?"

"Maybe an American game," the duke said, looking upward.

The ceiling fairly shook with thumpings and bangings as though chairs were being thrown about. At that moment a loud cry was heard and the sound of running feet.

"Good heavens!" shouted Mrs. Wyndham, turning pale.

The duke tugged nervously at his mustache.

The running feet pounded down the servants' staircase, with loud shouts rising in all parts of the great house. Crash! They struck the hallway.

"Stop, you," they heard an angry voice raised.

"We're being robbed," shrieked Mrs. Wyndham.

The door leading from the hallway burst open. They heard a terrific scuffling and hurrying to the arch between the living room and library, saw three men struggling fiercely in the doorway.

"Oh, my God," wailed Mrs. Wyndham.

"Athelstan, switch on the light," Iris cried.

The duke tugged at his mustache, but otherwise remained immovable. Dusk had fallen outside and the book-lined room was lighted only by the faint glow of the low lights in the living room.

Suddenly one of the figures slumped to the floor with a groan. Iris started toward the

switch herself. Then everything seemed to happen at once, freezing her in her tracks. One dark, strong figure surged forward out of the grasp of the other, and rushed straight to her. She retreated between her mother and Athelstan. Her mother screamed, Athelstan recoiled.

"Stop, damn you," panted the other man and lunged ahead.

The first figure whirled. In the semi-darkness Iris saw a streak, heard a sickening impact, and the pursuer spun around and collapsed. Another shout from above was answered by a shout outside. More feet pounded on the stair. And the strong, dark figure glided across the floor like a shadow, and in one sinewy leap sprang into the casement window.

A crack split the air and an ominous thud struck the casement. The man crouched in the window drew back. Mrs. Wyndham swooned, Athelstan sighed. Iris bent forward. The face of the man was etched in clear lines against the blue dusk sky. She put her hand over her mouth to suppress a cry.

Some one burst into the room, shouting. The figure in the window tautened, and leaped. Two shots rang out in quick succession. The newcomer rushed to the window, looked out.

"Did the shot hit him?" Iris asked, breathless.

"No, ma'am, he's scuttling in the bushes. Come on, Bo."

Bo raised himself from the floor and followed

the other man through the window. Iris heard them shouting outside. Bowles, for it was he who had crumpled at the door, had recovered enough to lead Mrs. Wyndham's limp form to the divan. Athelstan pulled the cord and now maids came running.

While her mother was being revived, Iris waited tensely for word from the chase. She was unreasonably eager that the man who had created such havoc in her home should escape. She couldn't explain to herself why her heart ran with him, except, perhaps, there was a touch of romantic adventure in that profile against the sky . . . the handsome profile of Craig, the gardener.

Mrs. Wyndham fluttered. "Oh," she sighed, "what has happened?"

Keenan, the head guardian, entered heavily. "I don't know, Mrs. Wyndham. Some fellow escaped. We couldn't find him. Jones, here, can tell us something."

Jones looked unhappy with an enormous swelling under his eye. He said, dolefully:

"I was walking toward my quarters after being relieved on watch by Bryant, and I looked toward the Manor. It was dusk, and no lights were on. I thought I saw a figure swing from one window to another upstairs. I placed it around the Duke of Athelstan's room."

"My room?"

"Yes, your grace. I wasn't sure. It was done so quick. It looked like a monkey."

"Go on," Keenan said.

"Well, I got Perkins, the assistant mechanic, and we came in to investigate. Bowles was busy and he sent Graham along with us. Bowles said that his grace was not in his room. We looked in the bathroom next to his grace's room and found the window open all the way from the bottom. Then we knocked on the door of the Duke of Athelstan's room."

The duke leaned forward. "Yes," he said tensely.

"Well, we knocked and there was no answer, but we thought we heard some one. The three of us opened the door. Something rushed at us. We all grabbed. Well, there was a scuffle. Graham . . . I guess he's still up there . . . went under from a nasty right. Perkins and I tried to keep him from getting in a good lick, but he got a blow off my pan that floored me.

"Perkins was trying to clinch, but he threw him off and measured him with a beaut. I guess Perkins' still up there too. I grabbed at him but he beat it and I got up and chased him. Bowles ran into him as he tried to get to the front door, knocking him against the library door. I jumped on his back and the door gave in.

"He got in a good one at Bowles," he looked toward the butler.

The butler cleared his throat disapprovingly.

"When Bowles went down, he threw me off with a trick. But I kept my feet and went at him. He hit me as I was grabbing for a handkerchief he wore tied around his mug. I got the handkerchief, but . . ." he paused, and felt of his jaw.

"Did you recognize him?" Iris said, taut with suspense.

"No, ma'am, it happened so quick like. . . ."

Perkins and Graham slunk into the room.

"Beggin' your pardons," Perkins said, "we tried to see what he got in your grace's room!"

"Well!" The duke strained, his eyes bulging.

"He didn't take no money, nor trinkets. But the trunk and drawers were ransacked. I guess he wanted something else."

Keenan said: "Do you know of anything any one could want, your grace?"

The duke started to speak, then checked himself. He looked at Keenan, then at the floor. "No," he said. "I can't imagine."

As the men filed out of the room, Iris thought this was a strange mess. Their impudent gardener, with the peculiar atmosphere hanging about him, ransacking the duke's room, but not for money.

She knew she should speak. Yet, the vivid picture of that gallant face against the sky touched something in her. She determined she would never hold it over him, force him with it; but all at once, a quickened interest in life seized

her. She shared in excitement, adventure, beyond the dull routine of her life. And a man who could awaken in her a new sense of life was worth having around. . . .

CHAPTER IV

AT the end of the day's work, Craig went to his quarters. He washed his face and hands, combed his hair and went down the back stairs into the garage. Coombes, the chauffeur, sat on a nail keg smoking a cigarette. He looked up as Craig approached and nodded. Craig sat down on the cement floor and hooked his large, capable hands around his knees. "Well," he said, "the young man fares forth to the big city to-night."

"Stepping out, eh?"

"Not exactly. Just an appointment with a friend. To-morrow I rest from my labors. I plan to reach New York by midnight at the latest, spend the night with my friend, and return to-morrow night. Is there a car that isn't in use?"

"The Packard roadster isn't doing anything."

"Picture me in a Packard roadster," Craig grinned.

"Yeh, picture you in a Packard roadster in that soup and fish upstairs. What I'd like to know is what you do with that layout of clothes."

"I finger them over lovingly every night," Craig said. "They express my frustrated personality."

"You can't kid me, big boy. You got a rich uncle or a fortune in gilt-edged securities tucked away somewhere."

"My fortune lies in these two dirt-stained hands," Craig said, putting them out.

"They're harder than they were when you come," Coombes said with a shrewd glance.

"Detective Coombes is on the scent of a poverty-ridden middle western family," Craig said grandiloquently. "He will run them to earth if it takes him the rest of his life. Coombes never fails."

"Coombes has got a head," the chauffeur said. "He ain't been livin' thirty years for the fun of it."

"I can see by your chin you come of serious stock," Craig said rising. "I'll go up and climb into the dinner coat."

"Tell New York I'm comin'," Coombes said. "If you're at a loose end to-night, try the Rabbit's Foot at Eighth Street and Seventh Avenue. They're open till three."

"Thanks. Shine the buggy, will you? I want to make a magnificent entrance."

"Leave it to me. You'll make Mr. Astor go home an' cry for shame."

"Okay. I'll be down in a half-hour."

Craig went back to his quarters and bathed. He opened his clothes closet and looked at the contents. He shook his head with a grim little

smile and lifted his tuxedo off the rack. A camel's hair topcoat came next, for driving. The night air might be cool.

It was dusk. The drive to New York would be marvelous. Suppose there were some one with him? If only there might be a girl in the seat beside him, her hair blowing in the wind, her face turned up to the moon, her voice saying unimportant, feminine things.

Craig was lonely. The parties at the Manor gave him a restless feeling. Life going on about him, excluding him. To-night, a late night of music and dancing, perhaps. To-morrow a luxurious breakfast in a New York hotel, luncheon with his best friend and then back to the rose-bushes.

He laughed a little. If only he might walk boldly up to the Manor and say, "Miss Wyndham . . . come and let the wind blow your hair . . . come along and chatter about unimportant, feminine things. Come and dance with me . . . lunch with me to-morrow at the Ritz . . ." no, that was too expensive. "Lunch with me at Longchamps," then. Even a gardener could afford an occasional luncheon at Longchamps.

Solitude was making him ridiculous. He shook the thought off with a brusque little movement of his broad shoulders and shrugged himself into his dinner coat. It fit like a glove. The crease in his trousers was a knife blade. His

top hat was hooked from the upper shelf and he was ready. He reached his white gloves on the top of the chifforobe and caught up the camel's hair topcoat. A night of freedom.

Downstairs, he grinned at Coombes and turned around.

Coombes whistled. "You're a neat-looking object," he said.

"Is there a speck of fluff on that left shoulder, my man? Flick it off, like a good fellow."

"You're one for jokes," Coombes said good-naturedly. "You'd better crash a society racket to-night. You're too grand for the Rabbit's Foot. They've never seen an outfit like that."

"Is the car ready?"

"Polished to the last fender."

"Shall I run it out?"

"Sure you'll run it out. Think we got servants' chauffeurs around here?"

"Don't be mad at me," Craig said, grinning. "I didn't mean any harm. I'm only a Cinderella, asking for her pumpkin coach. Lead me to it, fairy Godmother."

"Lead yourself to it. You're no cripple."

"Only a matter of form, my lord. Spare these aching shoulders. They've wielded a pick and shovel to the glory of Wyndham Manor. Have you no loyalty? Have you no class spirit?"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," Coombes said good-naturedly, "but I'll break

your head in if you don't get away and stop makin' fun of me."

"Could I make fun of the man who loans me a Packard roadster? I could not. My soul overflows with gratitude. My life shall be one of service, devoted to you, my true and loyal friend."

Craig went in the garage and backed out a few moments later in the roadster. His top hat sat at a rakish angle. He waved over his shoulder. Coombes stared after him. "There's somethin' about that guy," he said. "Class, that's what it is. I'll bet he's been rich once. Nobody but rich people talk like him."

While Craig was swooping down the driveway, Iris, in cream taffeta and petit point lace, was telephoning the garage. "I'll have the Packard around for you, Athelstan," she said. "It's the only roadster that doesn't require a week's work to turn around. That is, if you're sure you don't want some one to drive for you."

"It's such a short drive, my dear girl. It seems rather silly to take a driver just for the village, don't you think?"

"It doesn't matter. They're there if you want them. You'll be back soon? You're the most important guest, you know. Everybody's goggling to see you."

"Just long enough to send a message," Athelstan said. "I'll return as soon as I can."

Iris was connected with the garage. "Send the

Packard roadster, Coombes," she said. "What? *Craig!* Did you say *Craig?*" There was some conversation at the other end. "How long ago?"

She hung up. She looked a little annoyed. She lifted the receiver once more and jangled the hook. "Connect me with the gatekeeper's lodge," she said. She was connected with Ladd. "Stop *Craig* at the gate and send him back to the Manor," she said. "He'll be along in a moment."

She rose and went to the piano. Her fingers touched the keys lightly for a moment and then she said, "*Craig*, the gardener, has the car. He's coming back with it. It will be only a moment."

"Is that the fellow who . . . who . . ."

"Yes," Iris murmured.

"Insolent upstart," Athelstan said nastily.

"Don't be childish, Athelstan."

"You seem to have a peculiar interest in that gardener fellow, Iris."

"Only the interest that a person takes in an unusual servant," she said. She played louder to drown the laughter of that faint, beating voice within.

Athelstan started forward. "Iris," he said huskily, "Iris . . . listen to me. . . ."

Just then Tony Wyndham, her brother, came in followed by five others. "Iris honey . . . they're waiting for you on the terrace."

"I was waiting for the car," she said. "Athelstan's driving to the village."

"Well, come out and wait on the terrace. I'm fed up trying to explain to Mrs. Brandon's ear trumpet how we got the house across the ocean. She thinks it was done with cranes."

"We can wait there as well as inside, I suppose," Iris said. "Tony, where did you leave Marianne?"

"In the clutches of the maternal Wyndham," Tony said. "She's telling Marianne how I had curls and kicked my nurse in the shins when she tried to comb them. Next she'll be showing her photographs of little Tony in the bathtub grinning like an imbecile. I'm going to confiscate those confounded things."

They went to the terrace and joined the guests. Sheila Langfort was there, with her never-ending discussion of the latest Paris models, attired in one, with her long, blonde hair caught in a loose knot at the nape of her neck.

O'Ferrall Carewe, noted sportsman and owner of the speedboat Flash, which had broken all previous records at the Peckham regatta, was slouched in a wicker chair wondering when Iris would make her appearance. He brightened when she did. "Ah, Iris," he said, "the moonlight becomes brighter."

"O'Ferrall wants me to be a moonbeam," Iris said.

She sat down beside him. Tony sat on the arm of her chair. The roar of a high-powered motor

entered the court. Iris said, "That's the car, Athelstan."

Tony said, "Isn't that the Packard, Iris?"

"Yes."

"Who's the chap?"

Iris raised her eyebrows and indicated the other guests. Tony looked puzzled. When the tall figure of Craig advanced across the terrace, hatless, Iris checked a gasp. In evening clothes, he was striking. She stood up and excused herself. She went across the terrace to meet him. He said, "Ladd told me you wanted to see me, Miss Wyndham."

"I wanted the roadster," Iris said. "One of my guests is driving to the village."

"I am very sorry to have inconvenienced you."

"It won't be long. You may have it when he returns."

"You are very kind. Will it be sent to the garage or will you call me?"

"I will have Bowles call. You may get it at the outer entrance."

"Thank you." He started to turn away when Sheila Langfort came across the terrace and touched his arm. She held her hand out. "Hello, you," she said.

"How do you do," Craig said, bowing.

"You don't remember me. I can see you don't, naughty man!"

"I'm afraid . . ."

"At Monte Carlo . . . at the gaming tables. Remember? It was the night you had that astounding streak of luck playing the black. I sat next to you. We talked a lot."

"I'm afraid you've made a mistake," Craig said. He smiled in a friendly manner. "I have never been at Monte Carlo."

Iris was staring at him fixedly. Perfectly at ease, well poised, well dressed. A strange gardener! She said, "This . . . this is Mr. Craig, Sheila."

"You bear the most amazing resemblance to . . . to the gentleman I spoke of," she said. "I . . . I can't understand it. He was thinner, of course, but . . ."

"One of those common faces," Craig said with a slight smile. "I've been mistaken for a number of men."

"Not all at once, I hope," Tony said, coming up behind them and catching the last remark.

Craig allowed himself a grin. "I expect to reach that point soon," he said. "Some one will ask me if I'm not the group of men he saw standing on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street smoking a pipe. I'll be baffled."

"Your friend is going to join us, isn't he, Iris?" Sheila asked. She saw Craig making motions to depart.

Iris hesitated. Why didn't she introduce him as the gardener and have it over? Did she lack

the courage to say to Sheila Langfort, "This man is a servant. His place is at the back door," or did she want him to stay? She said, "Join us, Mr. Craig, until Athelstan returns with the car."

Craig looked at her. He seemed to read her thoughts. "Really," he said, "I'm afraid . . ."

Sheila Langfort spoke up. "Oh, come," she said archly, "you're not that busy . . . are you? Just a few moments."

Tony spoke up. "Better stay, Craig," he said. "Life's full of invitations, but not of Sheila Langfort's invitations."

Craig looked straight at Iris. "I am honored by the invitation," he said softly. She turned away.

Sheila hooked her arm in his and led him up the terrace. She introduced him to Carewe. Iris watched him. He walked and talked like a gentleman. His voice was low, and his smile charming. He was obviously at ease, but anxious to leave the group and start on his journey. She went over to them. He turned with relief in his eyes. Carewe drew Sheila into a conversation and Iris said, "You are very grand to-night."

"You are more beautiful than I have ever seen you, Miss Wyndham."

"You have not seen me often."

"I have not had the opportunity," he said. "You are always so . . . far away." At the expression of her eyes, he said hastily, "Don't mis-

understand, please. I did not mean to be impertinent. I was speaking of distance."

"You are going to New York, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Do you go often?"

"Not very. My duties here keep me rather close. To-morrow is my day off."

"I hope you have an enjoyable trip."

"It will be doubly enjoyable now," he said.

"Craig . . . why are you here?"

"You sent for me, Miss Wyndham. I am sorry that circumstances forced me to stay. I will go now, if you wish."

"I didn't mean that. I'm trying, in my own coy way, to find out why you are working as a gardener."

"I must make a living."

"This kind of a living?"

"Would you have me be a host at a night club? I might be able to handle that."

"You *are* evasive," she said. She half turned from him and regarded the guests on the terrace.

"You are at home here," she said.

"Only temporarily."

"The Duke of Athelstan tells me that you have been courteously insulting to him."

"That is an art in itself," Craig said.

"The Duke of Athelstan is my guest."

"I understood that."

"I am very fond of Athelstan," Iris said. This was a lie. She wondered why she said it.

"His highness is fortunate," Craig said, without the twitch of an eyelash.

She gave it up as hopeless. Craig was an iron wall. His mind caught things and bounced them back with the ease of a tennis backstop. She felt trapped and helpless. Iris Wyndham had never before been trapped and helpless. It was a new and strangely pleasant experience. Nevertheless, she wanted to break that wall. She wanted to throw things through it and see them disappear into oblivion. She wanted Craig beaten into his rôle of servant . . . and she wanted to do the beating.

Sheila Langfort came over again and started her endless comments on his resemblance to the man she had met in Monte Carlo. Iris watched Craig. His face was like granite with a smile carved on it.

He had never been in Monte Carlo. He had never seen a roulette wheel. She felt that he was on the verge of telling Sheila that he was a gardener, and everything in her fought against it. She knew instinctively that he was only restraining that disclosure for her sake, that he wanted to get away . . . out on the high road again.

Athelstan came back with the car and Craig made his departure gracefully and with the aplomb of a gentleman. Iris watched his deft manipulations of the Packard roadster. He did not look back as he drove away. She went back

to her guests with a little twinge of regret. Where was he going, with that fund of restless gayety? Whom would he see? A servant girl, no doubt, dressed in fine feathers for one night, as he was.

CHAPTER V

THE swimming pool was in gala array. Powerful search lights pierced the night around it. Sheila Langfort poised on the spring board and went cleanly in. Tony, from one of the tents, clapped loudly and cried, "Bravo, Sheila . . . you'll find your chocolate rabbit in the lemonade tent!"

Electrical stars were strung over the pool, lighting the moonless night. On either side, brightly colored tents gave the atmosphere of an Arabian encampment. Lawn chairs graced the edges of the pool, in brilliantly striped canvas.

Iris occupied the main tent. She wore a light blue taffeta bathing suit with a shred of blue wool beneath it. Athelstan had joined her in her tent, and sat smoking moodily. His bathrobe was a delight to the eye. Brilliant stripes of blue cut across a background of orange. His bathing suit was black. His hair was immaculately combed; his mustache highly waxed.

Iris had been in the pool once, and the little taffeta slip had darker blue lines on it where the wet wool suit was soaking through.

"Iris," Athelstan said suddenly, "I want to talk to you alone."

"We're alone," Iris said.

"I mean without this hullabaloo going on."

Iris looked at the pool. Tony was having a hilarious game of catch with a rubber ball the size of a small balloon. O'Ferrall Carewe stood on the other side of the pool shouting something unintelligible. Sheila came around to Iris' tent and flopped down on a pile of green cushions.

"Iris," she said, "never in my life have I visited a place like Wyndham Manor. It takes my breath. It is elaborate, sweeping. Somehow you feel that the whole world is Wyndham Manor, and you have the run of it. One spectacle a year like this one would diminish my puny income to an infinitesimal nothing. You have them as a regular thing. I am green with envy."

"Why?" Iris asked. "I think I'd rather attend one spectacle a year and go home early to a book or my bed. I'm sick of it. Honestly, Sheila, you've no idea how wearing it is. Have a caramel."

"I'm on a diet, thanks. Hide them, do you mind? They're my ruling passion. It's caramels that have put me where I am to-day, tipping the scales at one hundred and twenty-five, I'll have you know." She looked archly at the duke, waiting for him to say that she was "just right."

He said it. She smiled up at him gratefully. Iris looked away, sickened. Her world. Full of fishermen and liars. It was a game. One fished for compliments in a heavy handed manner and

received them as a matter of course. One found that certain phrases brought certain replies, and certain replies brought certain looks.

Her world was certain. There was no escaping it. It was all a grand and glorious spectacle. She played a little silent game with herself, trying to single out one friend who was not in the thick of the spectacle, fighting doggedly to seem what he was not.

She tired of that. It had only one end. They were all artificial, all intent on being something they were not and never could be. Even Craig, her gardener, played that he was something else at times. Apparently artificiality extended to his circle too.

Sheila had crept closer to the duke and was talking in a soft, caressing tone. Athelstan leaned over her with the look of a man who is being flattered and likes it.

Iris rose and tossed her blue taffeta slip aside. She stood outlined against the background of the colorful tents like a small, blue spear. "I'm going in, Athelstan," she said. "Ring if you want coffee and sandwiches. They're all down at the other end."

"Thank you, Iris."

Sheila cooed, "Oh, I want to see Iris dive! She dives so nicely."

"You dive beautifully," Iris said mechanically. She was playing the game too. A compliment

for a compliment, a lie for a lie. She hated herself and her world.

The plunge into the pool cleared her head. She shook the water from her eyes and struck out in a long, easy stroke. Tony popped up suddenly and said, "How do you do, Miss Wyndham? How unusual that we should run into each other here, of *all* places! It does show that it's a small world, after all, doesn't it?"

She slapped the water and it spewed in his face. He dove under her and came up on the other side. A deluge of water soaked the bright bandanna over her hair. She turned and gasped, "Tony, go away with your nonsense!"

"Tony go away," Tony said, "just because you're getting the worst of it . . ." another deluge took her in the ear. Gasping and choking, she turned around and kicked vigorously, Tony dove again and came up in front of her. "King's X," she cried, remembering their childhood games.

"Scaredy cat," he cried delightedly. "Come over and have a lemonade with your adoring brother."

"Anything to get away from my adoring brother's rowdy games," she said.

He pulled her up over the edge of the pool and hugged her. "Iris honey," he said, "let's cut sometime and have a little vacation all to ourselves, away from this, can't we?"

"You're sick of it too, aren't you, boy?"

"Sick to hell," he said.

"Try and get away from it," she said. "Try."

"Iris . . . that hopeless tone is not like you."

"Oh, Tony . . . I'm not myself. I haven't been. I'm sick at heart. All this goo thrown at us for the benefit of . . ." she jerked her head in the direction of her tent where Athelstan and Sheila were shrieking with laughter.

"They're trying to marry you off, aren't they, baby?"

"Something like that. You're lucky, Tony. You can make any kind of marriage that suits your masculine fancy. I'm supposed to be brilliant, I am. I'm going to shine in the circles of the socially elect. I'm a little pawn in the hands of fate."

They walked slowly toward the lemonade tent and stood against an improvised bar. Tony leaned forward impulsively, "You don't have to accept him," he said.

"I know it. What else is there for me? Have you seen the excuses for men that mother drags in for me? Have you seen the vitriolic looks I get when I'm not hanging on the words of his highness?"

"It gripes me to hear her call him highness," Tony said. "I'd hate to think of you at the head of his table, sister mine."

"I won't be able to eat if I am," said Iris. "Let's forget it, Tony. Can't we talk of . . . of cabbages and kings?"

"Kings are royalty, honey. We'll talk of cabbages. They're remote, at least."

She squeezed his hand. "Tony," she said, "you're a darling of darlings. I don't know what I'd do without you."

"I'm with you to the last ditch," he said. "I'll take you away if you say the word and work in a factory to support you."

"Wyndham Manor is your birthright," Iris said. "I'll go through alone. I'll reign in solitary splendor in my castle on the Thames, hiding my aching heart and all that rot. I want another glass of lemonade."

"My darling sister with a glass of lemonade in one hand and an aching heart in the other."

"Marianne's ready to drag the pool for you, Tony. She has a harassed look in her eye. Give me the lemonade and run along."

"See you later. Shall we join you at your tent?"

"Spare yourself," she said, with a faint smile. "I can ask a lot, but not that. Sheila is there having gummy conversation with Athelstan."

She went back to her tent. Her father and mother could be seen taking their departure, down at the other end of the pool. Athelstan managed to say in an undertone, "Iris . . . let me see you alone after they've all gone."

"Stay here," Iris said, "and I'll come back when I've shaken the hands of the thinners-out."

He nodded.

At two o'clock, the pool was deserted, except for Iris and Athelstan. They sat staring at each other across the pile of green cushions. He did not attempt to touch her. He seemed nervous and ill at ease. Frequently, his hand went up in its nervous gesture of tugging at the diminutive mustache. "Iris," he said, "I want to marry you."

Iris looked down at her hands. They were lying inert in her lap. She wanted to twist them. Twisting hands was not in the rules of how to act when proposed to. She didn't twist them. She just sat there, staring straight ahead of her.

"I'm mad about you," he said huskily. "Quite mad. I picture you in my arms . . . it has its advantages as a marriage, Iris. You have to admit that."

"Oh, yes," she said slowly, "it has its advantages as a marriage."

"A fine old name . . . a fortune. . . ."

"I have a fine old name and a fortune."

"A title. . . ."

"Yes, that's it. I'll be the Duchess of Athelstan."

"There are many women who wouldn't hesitate."

"I am not many women," Iris said. "I am one."

"I could make you happy. There isn't a thing in the world you would want for."

"Nothing but simplicity and truth," Iris said.

"You couldn't give me that. It isn't in our world."

"You've notions of simple living?"

Iris stood up and stretched her arms out. She seemed to be calling something. The faint voice within was beating louder and almost frantically. The voice that called her away from her world into strange and unbeaten paths. The voice of a leader, urging battle. The voice that promised dangerous adventures in living. No more certainty, no more assurance, just Iris Wyndham against the world, fighting artificiality.

"I know," she said, "we all have visions. Illusions of our lives as we should live them. I guess I'm a little silly."

The voice grew fainter and less frantic. Stealing away from a coward . . . a pure, still, cold voice stealing away from an unworthy woman. Iris wanted to weep, suddenly, for its loss. She could not. She heard herself saying, "I'll marry you. Mother and father will be pleased."

"Iris!" Athelstan sprang up and started toward her. She drew back. He stepped over the pile of cushions and she saw his eyes. She went cold with fear, backed to the edge of the pool.

Craig, coming for a swim after the guests had gone, saw them from behind a tent. He stepped back of the bandstand, now empty of musicians, and stayed there. Iris put her hands up and

held them against Athelstan's breast. "Please, Athelstan," she said.

"Iris . . . not even the betrothal kiss?"

"I can't," she said. Her voice was a sob, and Craig flinched. Iris had fought a battle this night and had lost. Poor little princess.

He saw the duke advance, waving aside her protests. Iris looked around wildly, turned and ran rapidly toward the end of the pool.

The electrician came upon Craig in the darkness. He was grumbling. "Two o'clock," he said, "an' I'm supposed to be up at six. Four hours' sleep. Have they all gone?"

Craig hesitated, started around the bandstand. Iris stood for a moment on the edge of the pool watching the duke's advance. Suddenly, with her arms flung out against the sky for a brief moment, she dove high and deep, and disappeared beneath the faint green gleam of the water. The duke hesitated on the brink.

Craig turned, on impulse. "All gone," he said. "Let it go." The lights went out, leaving nothing but a faint, iridescent light which came from the waters of the pool. The night was black.

Craig, running toward the side of the pool Iris had headed for, smiled grimly at the sound of the duke's annoyed shouts. "Where's the fool who turned those lights out?" The fool had gone, and if he hadn't, would have gone without making his presence known. "Iris! Iris!"

Craig heard a slithering sound beside him. He said softly, "Ah, a mermaid," and reached down, groping for her.

He felt her sudden panic. "Who is it? Is that you, Tony?"

"It is I," Craig said, "Craig."

He kept a tight hold on her hand. She whispered, "Why are you here?"

"I came to swim," he said, "but I found that my real reason for existing was that of helping a princess in distress."

He led her into a dark tent and caught up a piece of soft cloth that brushed his leg as he entered. He wrapped it around her shoulders. "Quiet, now, runaway," he said.

"He'll be furious."

"Oh, undoubtedly. He'd go into a royal rage and have us flogged. I beg your pardon. He'll have *me* flogged."

"Hush. He's coming this way."

Craig hushed. They sat with bated breath until the duke had fumbled his cursing way into a tent and banged his shin against a lawn chair. They heard him give up the search audibly. He felt his way, moaning with pain and annoyance, to his own tent and put his shirt on inside out for lack of a light. When he emerged, he gave one last shout of "Iris!" and the echo slapped it back in his face. He started for the Manor.

Craig said, "Now, we may talk freely."

"I . . . really should . . ."

"Go," said Craig. "Of course you should. So should I."

"It's pleasant here," she said, with a wistful little sigh.

"Then stay," Craig said. "There are few enough moments of pleasantness."

"You've found that out too, then."

"Haven't I, though!"

"Oh, Craig . . . life gets hard to live sometimes, doesn't it?"

Craig was silent for a long moment. She felt that he was struggling to keep from saying something to her.

Finally he said, "To-night, you are Iris Wyndham, sitting beside me in the darkness, talking as any girl would talk. To-morrow you are Iris Wyndham, the fiancée of the Duke of Athelstan. I am once more the gardener. It is unbelievable."

"To-night, I am Iris and you are Craig," she said gently.

"Thank you, Iris."

"I am a lonely girl, Craig. This is escape."

"Why not escape forever? Why must you be lonely? Why live a life you hate because of a misfortune of birth?"

"Ah, you are free. It is easy to talk. You have no obligations . . . no ties . . . nothing to hold you. You drop your rake and look into the sunset and decide you wish to be elsewhere with the next sunset. You go, and that is the

end of it. If I disappeared, I would be hounded by reporters . . . tracked by detectives. Don't you understand?"

"I do understand, and I am sorry."

They were silent once more. The night and Craig had clutched Iris' heart in some strange fashion. The voice had come back to her. It was faint, but pleading like a wounded thing. That voice would not stand much more. It was fighting now. One last, desperate stand, trying to save Iris Wyndham from herself. She saw the outline of Craig's dark head and said suddenly, "Craig, I have a voice inside."

"I know," Craig said. "I was sure you had."

"I'm betraying it."

"I know that, too. You will lose it soon, Iris. You can't keep inner voices when you ignore them."

"What can I do?"

"Follow where it leads, child. Believe in it. Find happiness at the end of its road. Won't you try?"

There was a whispering sigh. "Craig . . . my road leads toward unhappiness. Why should I try to convince myself that it doesn't? It's useless. I know. I've known in my heart all along that I couldn't escape it. It's like running from your shadow. Always on your heels, bobbing in front of you sometimes to remind you that it's there. You couldn't understand."

"I can't argue against your fatalism," Craig

said. "I'm not going to try. But sometime, when you're about to take a step on that unhappy road, stop and remember what I said. Follow the voice. Be untrue to everything else in the world if you must, but keep straight with yourself. That voice is you, Iris. This shell that presides at your fêtes is not you. Don't drive the inner light out and keep the shell foremost in importance."

"Let's talk of something else, Craig. I'm bursting inside. I may weep any moment. It wouldn't be pleasant to have a weeping woman on your hands."

"The gardener can offer such poor comfort," Craig said, low-voiced. "Iris, from the bottom of my heart, I am sorry for you. Does that help?"

"Yes," she said.

"Will you remember that I am ready, at all times, to help?"

"I will remember," she said. "A gallant, offering his trusty sword to a lady in distress."

"A gallant offering a rusty rake," he murmured.

"Trusty sword or rusty rake, Craig, I thank you. There will be no necessity for either, but it does not keep me from being grateful."

There was a strange tension in the air. Craig was clenching his hands. A powerful emotion welled up in him. He wanted to take Iris Wyndham in his arms. She was there, close, in the

darkness. She was broken, to-night. There was nothing of her pride left. He said, "Iris . . . it is late."

"I know," she said. "I know I must go, but let me go as you would let another girl go. Don't send me away because I am Iris Wyndham. To-night is . . . is my night of freedom. Say good-night as though you were sorry to see me leave."

He reached out and found her hand in the darkness. It was small and cool. "*I am* sorry," he said, and she knew he meant it.

She dragged her hand away from his. Why had he touched her? Why did the voice start a song in her breast at the touch of his hand? She jumped to her feet. Her voice caught in her throat and came out in a little gasp. "Craig . . ." she said. "Good-night, and thank you."

She was gone, then, running through the darkness into the grove as surefootedly as a doe. Craig stood on the edge of the pool for a moment, his face drawn into thoughtful lines.

He sought the cool waters of the pool for relief.

CHAPTER VI

THE following morning Iris, dressed for motoring, called the garage. She ordered the Packard roadster and Coombes brought it around.

In the bright light of the day, Iris found changed values. The hour with Craig in the tent the night before did not seem to be a part of her life. It had happened to some one else. It could not have happened to Iris Wyndham. She met Coombes at the entrance court. She was dressed in a beige ensemble with a soft gray felt hat pulled low over her copper hair. In her arm she carried Mimi, her Pekinese.

Coombes touched his cap. "All right, Coombes," she said. "I'll drive alone." She put Mimi in the seat of the roadster.

The prospect of driving alone was pleasant. She needed solitude. Her mind was whirling. She did not know herself or the workings of her mind. Everything seemed to have been turned topsy-turvy inside her. It would straighten out as the road unwound. She wanted to feel the wheel in her hands. The contact with hard wood, the very business of guiding a powerful motor along a road would straighten her. Coombes

said, "Yes, Miss Wyndham," and opened the door. As he got out, Iris saw him reach for a letter on the seat beside him. It was stamped, ready to post.

"I'll mail it for you, Coombes," she said. "You may not be going in."

"It isn't mine, miss. Craig gave it to me and asked me to mail it in New York."

"I see."

"It's important, Miss Wyndham. He's got a special delivery stamp on it."

"I'll take care of it."

"Thank you, miss. You're sure it's not too much of a bother?"

"It's no bother, Coombes. Mother wants the Pierce-Arrow brought around at noon. Will you make a note of it?"

"Yes, Miss Wyndham." Coombes touched his hat once more and stepped back. Iris took the wheel and the Packard roared out and down the driveway.

The letter was in her lap, with her purse. She stole a glance at it. It was lying there with the address face up. Miss Judith Spottswood, Sulgrave, Virginia.

Miss Judith Spottswood. Who was Judith Spottswood? Craig either had an important message to convey to Judith Spottswood, or he was very much in love. Men sent special delivery letters for two reasons only. Important business or love.

Well, love was important business, wasn't it? She wondered why the sight of that name gave her a depressed feeling. She stepped on the accelerator viciously. Why should she, Iris Wyndham, give a hoot what the girl's name was? She zoomed around a corner on two wheels and slowed down.

Judith Spottswood. Judith. Southern. Sulgrave, Virginia. A southern girl with a drawl. If he liked drawling southern girls there wasn't any reason why she should worry about it. She stole another glance at it and picked it up. It was a long letter, heavy. It wasn't important business, then. Men wrote short letters about important business. It was love.

Craig was in love. Probably the girl loved him terribly. Horrible thought. Craig in love and a drawling southern girl terribly in love with *him*. He was following his voice; a voice that led him southward.

Her lips were set in a white, thin line. She was angry at herself. Why should she think of him? Why? Because he had been kind in the tent last night . . . because he had known about the voice that cried and beat at her, begging for release. He wanted her to have pity on the voice. He wanted her to be courageous.

It was easy for him to talk. Courage did not come with talk. Courage came only when your back was to the wall and you were fighting for

your life. She had had glimmerings . . . but only glimmerings.

As she put the letter down, she noticed the stationery. It was expensive vellum, a large square envelope with the flap handsomely engraved with the initials D.C.C.

She reflected that stationery like that made a sizable hole in her allowance. How could Craig . . . a gardener . . . afford its absence from his meager salary?

Handsomely engraved stationery, special delivery, to Judith Spottswood, who drawled and didn't sound her R's. Iris shrugged. She was amused. She *must* be amused. It was comic, her concentration on Craig, his love affair and his stationery. She had better things to think of. But . . . did she?

She drove furiously until she reached New York. There was shopping to do. She selected three frocks and hats to match, called a friend and had tea at a small restaurant in the fifties. Then she started back.

She reached Wyndham Manor at seven o'clock and drove to the garage. Craig stood there talking to Coombes. He smiled in a friendly manner and came over to help her from the car. She ignored his hand, nodding curtly. "The brakes are a trifle loose, Coombes," she said. "Will you see to it?"

"Yes, Miss Wyndham."

Craig, unable to understand her attitude, said, "Was the drive pleasant?"

She looked straight through him. "It is always pleasant," she said. She hesitated a moment and then her eyes seemed to focus on him. "I mailed your letter."

"*You* mailed my letter?"

"I took it from Coombes," she said. "He seemed to think it was important."

"It was," he said. His voice had hardened slightly. "Thank you for posting it. I am sorry you were troubled by it."

"I wasn't troubled," she said shortly. "Your . . . stationery is very handsome, Craig."

"It is neat but not gaudy," Craig said, unbending to a slight smile.

"It is very expensive. How do you manage it on your income?"

"It is my one luxury," Craig said. "I suppose the disposition of my salary is my own affair?"

"Of course. It merely seemed rather unusual."

"Am I to take this as a rebuke?"

"Not at all."

"If so, I will gladly write on lined tablet paper and use stamped envelopes."

"Don't be ridiculous. What concern is it of mine?"

"I took your comment as concern."

"It wasn't."

She was furious with herself for discussing it.

How dared he assume that the intimacy of the night before could be continued? On impulse, she shoved Mimi in his arms. "Take her to the house," she said.

For a moment, Craig stood as though stunned. A strange gleam came in his eyes. He turned without a word and started toward the Manor. Iris followed him. It was a ludicrous picture, Craig, stiff and unbending, cradling silly little Mimi in his arms, with his face a frozen mask.

She could not break that wall. She *could* not. He was iron clear through. He started to enter the court leading to the front of the castle.

She said sharply, "The servants' entrance, Craig. Give her to Marie, my maid."

"Yes, Miss Wyndham," he said, turned on his heel and started for the servants' entrance.

He did not look at her. She stood staring after him. What an impossible man! Why did she allow him to disturb her? She yanked her gloves off with an impatient jerk and entered the door.

Once in her apartment, she was sorry. Why had she given Mimi to him? What devilish impulse drove her to hurt him, to wound his pride? Mimi sat at her feet, looking gravely at a bit of fluff that chased across the floor. Iris leaned down and picked her up. She buried her face in the soft fur. "Mimi," she said softly, "why am I deliberately unkind to him? Tell me why, Mimi. You must know."

If Mimi knew, she did not let Iris in on the secret. She blinked respectfully and continued to stare at the bit of fluff. "Mimi," Iris said then, even more softly, "you were in his arms." A hot flush crept up from her throat and stained the delicate cheeks to an almost indelicate hue. She put Mimi down hastily and turned to pat her hair into shape.

As she went downstairs, she heard the sound of loud voices. She passed the curve in the stairway and stopped. Athelstan was standing at the foot of the stairs and Craig stood a step above him, looking down slightly.

"My good man," Athelstan drawled, "you are infinitely superior to your position. They should present you with a seat on the exchange, where you would have nothing to do but sit."

"I am infinitely superior to my position," Craig retorted, with ice in his tones, "and I have better ways of spending my time than that of discussing stock exchange chairs. I couldn't use one. I'm sure they haven't arms."

"Will you do as you are ordered, or shall I report you and have you discharged?"

"I would suggest that you have me discharged," Craig said. "Think of the satisfaction involved!"

"You are insolent!"

"I am positively impossible."

"If you were my servant, I would have you beaten and ejected from the grounds."

"I am not your servant," Craig said evenly, "for which I fervently thank God."

"I will give you one more chance. You will black my riding boots or I shall report you."

"I repeat that there are many servants who can black your boots, but only one on the estate who can give you infinite satisfaction by being discharged."

"You refuse, then?"

"Refuses what?" Mrs. Wyndham cried, coming up to Athelstan.

"I told this fellow that my boots were waiting to be blacked. He refuses to do it."

"What capacity do you serve in?" Mrs. Wyndham asked.

"I am the assistant gardener, madam."

Mrs. Wyndham looked perplexed. She had never before faced the problem of discharging a servant. It was all attended to belowstairs. She said weakly, "What is your name?"

"I am called Craig, madam."

"Craig . . . why do you refuse his highness' request?"

"It was not a request," Craig said evenly. "It was a command."

"Why do you refuse his command?"

"Principally because I am not a bootblack. I have never blacked boots, Mrs. Wyndham."

"You will black these," Mrs. Wyndham said coldly, "or give notice."

Craig bowed. "I will give notice," he said.

Iris started forward. Athelstan said insultingly, "You are willing to play nursemaid to a dog."

Iris saw Craig's hands clench at his sides. "Miss Wyndham asked me to take her dog to her boudoir," he said. "I took it because I serve Miss Wyndham, not because I like the feeling of a dog under my arm."

"I see. Perhaps you will become more elastic in the process of holding other positions."

"One can never tell," Craig said, with a charming smile.

Mrs. Wyndham said, "You understand that you are to give notice."

"Yes, Mrs. Wyndham."

Iris said: "Mother."

"Yes, darling?"

"One moment. Stay where you are, Craig." She came downstairs slowly and looked at Athelstan. "Have you any particular reason for wanting Craig to black your boots? Wouldn't another man do as well?"

"He was insolent and discourteous, Iris."

"I have known Craig for some time," Iris said. "I have never seen him insolent or discourteous. That was not my question. I asked you if another man mightn't black your boots as well."

"Of course, but . . ."

"One would think that you might prefer an experienced bootblack," she said. "I should." She turned to her mother. "You are proud of your gardens," she said. "If you persist in dis-

charging excellent gardeners because they have not been trained in the art of shoe polishing, you will not be proud of the gardens long. This man is an experienced gardener. He takes an interest in his work. He knows his place. It is not in the kitchen with a shoe rag. Ruggles is pleased with his work. Aren't you a trifle foolish, mother?"

"But, Iris . . . we can't allow our servants to insult our guests!"

"I heard the conversation. I should say that the insulting part of it came from Athelstan."

"Please, Miss Wyndham," Craig said, starting forward. "It is unimportant. One gardener more or less . . . I am sorry it was necessary for you to overhear."

"You will keep out of this, Craig. Mother, answer me. Aren't you being a trifle foolish?"

"Iris, you are making a scene . . . a positive scene."

"I *will* make a scene if you don't answer me."

"Why are you so concerned, Iris? You have never considered the gardens so important before."

Iris' eyes dropped. They met Craig's. There was a look of worshipful admiration in the depths of his.

"I am concerned," she said, lifting her chin a trifle, "because of justice, not because of the gardens. The gardens may grow to weeds and thistles. You may discharge all of the gardeners

for all it concerns me . . . but unless there is a valid reason for their discharge, it seems to me to be ridiculous and unjust.

"Craig here is a competent and respectful man. We need competent and respectful servants. Why should we discharge him because he does not care to undertake a proceeding which is given to the lowest menial in the establishment as a rule? I do not understand."

"Iris, we are insulting the duke if we do not discharge him."

"Miss Wyndham, *please*," Craig said.

"Be still," Iris said. "Mother, I do not want this man to leave. I see no reason why he should be discharged, and I will answer personally for any insult he may have offered Athelstan. I heard the conversation. Do you hear, Athelstan? If Craig is discharged, I shall go to my father and ask that he be engaged at a larger salary. Father will do it, too. What is there to be gained by sending him away if he comes back later for more money?"

Craig's face was drawn painfully. He was restraining a comment. Iris had asked him not to. If Iris had asked him, at that moment, to stop breathing, Craig would have complied. She was regal. She was a fairy princess condescending to champion an earthling. He felt like kneeling to touch the hem of her skirt.

"That's the way with you, Iris," Mrs. Wyndham said. "Each time you get an idea in your

head, you threaten to take it to Anthony because you know you can wind him around your finger."

"I can't see that it makes any difference how I win my point," Iris said, "as long as you know my threat to win it is not an empty one."

"Athelstan . . . the girl is out of her head. You can't blame me."

"Nobody is blaming you," Iris said. "You've done nothing to be blamed for. Craig stays or I go to father."

Mrs. Wyndham shrugged and turned away without another word. Iris smiled slightly. "You stay," she said to Craig.

He hesitated there a moment, looking up at her. She felt something in his eyes that she had never seen before. She felt that he was about to say something which had never been on his lips before, and then he said, "Thank you," and turned away.

CHAPTER VII

A POLO match had been arranged for the Duke of Athelstan. Iris, dressing, sighed a little. Another spectacle. Just another spectacle in a spectacular world. She slipped into a slender white silk frock and called her maid. "My white parasol," she said briefly. "The sun's going to be hot to-day, Marie."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Have my dinner clothes laid out at six-thirty. Dinner will be early to-night."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Marie . . . when you are off duty, do you have any conversation at all?"

"Mademoiselle?" Marie said bewilderedly.

"Exactly," Iris said, with a quick little laugh. "I wondered if your mouth ever opened without mademoiselle coming out. You may have the gold scarf, Marie. You are a nice girl."

"The gold scarf that matches mademoiselle's dinner dress? . . ."

"The gold scarf that matches mademoiselle's dinner dress," Iris said. She rose listlessly and gathered her parasol under her arm. Several hours of chattering with people she was not in-

terested in, several hours of watching Athelstan make brilliant plays on the field.

She strolled through the gardens and took the path leading to the field. From afar off, she could see the awnings which had been stretched along the sidelines and the brilliant splotches of red and green which were the lawn chairs. Tiny figures moved around among the chairs. She walked slowly. Each step brought her nearer to them. Each step was an unwilling advance toward boredom.

Craig stood at the side of the field, looking at it. A smooth stretch of green . . . polo ponies streaking across it as excited as their riders. They were not on the field yet, but he could see them in his mind's eye.

He had been assigned to the turf-replacing squad. He crossed toward the awning of the guests. He was a trifle sick at the sight of Iris, surrounded by a half-dozen young nincompoops who hung on her every word.

As he passed Sheila Langfort's chair, he heard her say, "The duke must be pleased at this opportunity to play polo. It's his passion, isn't it? I've heard about the brilliant matches he's played."

Tony said: "You won't believe it, Sheila, but he sneaks out here every night and bats balls through the goal posts because he's lonesome for it."

"Hush up, Tony," Iris said.

Craig's jaws set a little more firmly and he walked on. His tools were in the stable. He opened the stable door and went in. Spartan II, the prettiest pony in the Wyndhams' polo string, turned soft brown eyes upon him. Craig walked over and took his head in his two hands.

"Going to play to-day, aren't you, boy?" he said softly. "R'aring to go, too, you beauty." The horse nuzzled him and Craig slipped his hand up and down his nose lovingly.

After a moment of this, he gave Spartan one last affectionate pat and went on through to the room where the turf tools were kept.

Jock, the assistant groom, was there whittling a stick. Craig grinned. "Is that all you have to do?"

"No," Jock said, "but it's what I want to do."

"How's your arm?"

"Better. I've been working for a coupla days."

"Why aren't you saddling Spartan?"

"The kink wants to saddle his own. Says it's a essentrikity."

"Says it's a what?"

"I dunno. One of his habits."

"Oh, an idiosyncrasy."

"Maybe."

Craig laughed. "Are you going to watch the match?"

"Maybe."

"How's Spartan?"

"He's all right."

"He's anxious to get in."

"He's always anxious to get in."

Jock watched him curiously as he took the tools down. "It don't look as though you knew which end of that is which," he said.

"I don't," Craig said laughing. "I'm just a figurehead."

"What's a figurehead?"

"I'll buy you a dictionary."

"Aw, say you don't know an' get it over."

"I'll see you at the field," Craig said, starting out.

"Maybe."

Craig opened the door to the stable and started through. There was a sudden movement at Spartan's side. Athelstan stood up. His face was purple. It might have been purple from exertion, or it might have been the purple hue that comes with surprise. He had saddled Spartan, and his hand was on the girth. He snapped, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm getting my tools," Craig said mildly.

"Tools for what?"

"The turf."

"Get out of here, you meddlesome fool!"

"I'm getting out," Craig said. "What do you expect me to do, leap from here to the door?"

"I expect you to go about your business. Why you're always poking around odd spots is more than I know."

"I'm not always poking around odd spots," Craig said. "I came here on a legitimate errand."

"Don't stand there gaping at me! Get out!"

"Yes, your highness," Craig said mockingly. "Will you move aside while I leap?"

"None of your lip."

Craig jerked the door open with a frown. He failed to see the reason for Athelstan's perturbation. It puzzled him. He dragged the turf-tool behind him, whistling a low tune. Iris Wyndham saw him from the row of lawn chairs. She sent a servant to call him to her.

Craig laid the turf-tool down and went over to her. She smiled graciously. "I see you're still here," she said.

"Yes."

"Yes, Miss Wyndham."

"Yes, Miss Wyndham."

"Are you looking forward to the match?"

"Yes, Miss Wyndham."

"What were you doing with the iron?"

"I'm going to replace the divots," he said grinning.

"Have you ever worked on the turf before?"

"No, Miss Wyndham."

"That is getting monotonous," she said. "I know, I started it. You were thinking that, weren't you?"

"How do I answer?" he asked.

"Flat."

"Yes."

"All right," she said. "I just wondered what you were doing with the iron."

"May I go?"

"Go to your duties, faithful one."

Craig smiled at her and bowed quickly. In her simple white frock, she was just a girl. Her eyes were unhappy. His eyes clouded. He went back and picked up the turf iron with a thoughtful expression.

He was standing on the sidelines when the gong rang repeatedly. The onlookers rose from their seats. The players were coming out. Kentucky Blue came first, ridden by Tony Wyndham. Tony waved his mallet at Iris. "For the glory of Wyndham!" he yelled. "*Have* you the arnica?"

"An ambulance behind the stables," Iris called through her cupped hands.

Tony nodded and Kentucky Blue danced delightedly. Soon the ball would be whizzing alongside of him and he would be racing it. Carewe came out on Cavendish III, and rode over to Iris. "Colors, my lady," he said, leaning over. "A rose for my spear, I beg you."

Iris reached up and gave him her handkerchief. He tucked it in his blouse and joined Tony. There was a polite murmur from the crowd. Athelstan was coming out on Spartan. Craig smiled grimly when he saw the ashen color of his cheeks. A little patter of applause went up.

Tony leaned over to Carewe. "Aw," he said, "plant a claque for me, will you? No fair. No fair."

Carewe jerked his head over affectionately and knocked his hat off. Tony dismounted with an injured air. "A nice, new hat," he said, "a very nice, new hat, and now it isn't. I'll bet there's a grass stain on it."

"There'll be a grass stain on your nose, my young bucko, if you don't play more seriously than you talk. We're up against a player this time. Athelstan is world famous as an eight goal man."

"I'm famous for my rice puddings," Tony said, and galloped off a way to stand grinning at Carewe.

Spartan II pranced uneasily. Craig watched Athelstan. His hand was tight on the rein and the bit cut into Spartan's sensitive mouth. Craig winced as though he were wearing the bit. He made a half motion of protest and then dropped back, his hands clenched.

In three minutes, the five other men completing the two teams were on the field. The sharp clang of the gong rang out and the ball went down between the further goal posts.

Craig strained to watch Tony. He was a pretty rider. Kentucky Blue knew his every move. There was a sudden gasp from the crowd, a long drawn shriek from Sheila Lang-

fort, and the stream of people on the sidelines started pouring into the field.

Craig saw Iris leave her chair and start running. He followed the line of her eyes and started running toward Spartan II. The horse had thrown Athelstan and was standing bewilderedly in the middle of the field. The duke had taken the saddle with him and was lying under it.

Sympathetic hands helped him to his feet, sympathetic voices cooed over him. The saddle girth had broken. They untangled him from the saddle and felt him all over. He winced and groaned when Tony prodded his shoulder. "This will hurt a little," Tony said.

Athelstan wrenched away from him. "Beastly luck," he said sourly. "Positively beastly. This shoulder is wrenched. It had to be my right arm. I couldn't swing a mallet if my bally life depended upon it."

Iris said: "I'm sorry, Athelstan. Perhaps we can get Tommy Blount to ride Spartan. Can you walk?"

"Oh, I can walk, all right. I'm only sorry that I can't play."

"Tony, take him back to the stand and make him comfortable."

"Yes, sister mine."

Iris went over and touched Spartan. He was trembling with nervousness. "Steady, boy," she said gently. "*You* didn't fall, silly."

Craig's eyes softened. A man standing by Iris touched her arm.

"Look here," he said, indicating Craig, "isn't that the southern chap who plays in the international matches?"

"Which one?"

"The tall, dark one. Standing beside Lillian Strong."

"You mean . . . the one in the gray shirt?"

"Yes."

"That's Craig, our gardener."

"Oh, come off. I'm sure it's . . . ah . . . let me see, what *is* his name?"

"His name is Craig."

"You're sure he's your gardener?"

"Of course."

"Strange. Strange. I wish I could remember that chap's name. It's a joy to see him sock a ball for a goal. 'Trumpet,' he turned to a man behind him. "What is that southern chappie's name . . . the one who played in the international matches last year. . . . C— It began with C—"

"Lord, I don't know. I haven't seen a professional match since 1927. Missed them all, by gad. Trotting Mrs. Trumpet around to cures and fashionable watering places."

"That's annoying, Iris. Positively annoying. I should be able to remember his name. . . ."

"Save yourself the trouble," she said laughing. "It's the second time he's been taken for a pluto-

crat. He's an honest man and does an honest day's work for the money he spends on stationery."

"Nevertheless, I wish I could remember that. . . ."

Iris saw Craig start away from the edge of the crowd. He walked in long, purposeful strides. What had struck him?

Walking along, Craig wondered where he'd find Jock. Something was wrong somewhere. Saddle girths didn't break when they were Wyndham Manor saddles. Craig had seen those saddles. He skirted the pavilion, where excited groups were expressing audible disappointment that the duke was not to play, and cut around to the path leading to the stable.

As he approached the stable, he caught sight of Jock leading Spartan in for another saddle. The ill-fated saddle Athelstan had broken hung from his shoulder. Craig went into a swift dog trot and brought up short at the door of the stable. Jock said, "One side, big boy. We ride to-day."

"Wait a minute," Craig said. "I want to see something."

"What do you want to see?"

"Give me that saddle."

"Sure. I ain't stuck on havin' ridges on my shoulder."

Jock hunched it off his shoulder into Craig's

outstretched hands. Just then Athelstan rounded the corner of the stable.

"Put that down," he snapped.

Craig looked at him. "Put what down?"

"My saddle."

"It isn't your saddle," Craig said. "It belongs to this stable."

"Give it to me." Athelstan tried to snatch it from him and Craig jerked him half off his feet with his firm grip. He said softly, "Quietly, your highness. Quietly. The girth is broken, isn't it? It has to be fixed, doesn't it?"

"It doesn't have to be fixed by you," Athelstan snorted.

"What makes you think I'm going to fix it?"

"Give it to me."

"I'm sorry, but I've been appointed chief saddle keeper for the Wyndham estate. I take care of all saddles with broken girths."

"You insolent pup!"

"Your highness," Craig said mockingly, "it is beneath your royal dignity to be fussing around the stables. Leave that to menials like me."

"This is the crowning outrage. You will be discharged to-night."

"Wolf," Craig said calmly.

"Why are you so insistent about the saddle, my man? There is no reason *why* you should not have it, of course, but . . ."

"Of course not," Craig said smiling strangely. "Why are you so insistent that I give it up?"

"I understood that you were the gardener, not the stableman."

"I am."

"Call the head groom," Athelstan said to Jock. "Immediately."

"Yessir," Jock said. He looked at Craig wonderingly.

Craig said, still softly, "Do you think that wise?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean your summons to the head groom. It can't possibly do any good."

"It can at least teach you your place."

"But you see," Craig said, turning the saddle over and displaying the strap, "I've found out what I want to know. This girth did not break. It was cut clean . . . with a *knife*."

CHAPTER VIII

DINNER and boredom. The duke talking animatedly to Sheila Langfort, who sat on his left. Sheila Langfort trying to impress him. Iris closed her eyes and thought of cool things. Pools gleaming in moonlight, springs at the edge of a brook, the brook further down dipping over mossy stones. Wet leaves after a spring rain. . . .

Tony said, "Look here, Iris . . . you've put three teaspoons of sugar on your fruit cup."

"Three?" Iris said.

"I counted them. What are you thinking of?" He turned and beckoned the butler. "Another fruit cup for Miss Iris," he said.

Iris looked at him. "I was thinking of all sorts of things," she said. "Lakes and wet leaves . . . moss. Things like that."

"Lakes and wet leaves," Tony said in an undertone. "Poor old girl. Heigh-ho, life *is* highly mystifying. Here you sit in the midst of the most brilliant collection of guests in the country and think about wet pools and leaves." He dropped one eyelid deliberately. It had a comic effect. Iris choked and put her napkin over her mouth.

"Brilliance," she said when she recovered. "Look at them. Mother is wondering if Lillian Strong has an olive. Lillian is wondering who Sheila's modiste is, and she won't give her the satisfaction of asking. Athelstan may be wondering almost anything . . . probably why we don't serve tripe . . . Carewe wishes Sheila would stop her everlasting gurgling, and I'm wondering why we're all here."

"We're all here to eat," Tony said, in discouraged tones. "I wish I could take a small pellet every day and have it over."

Carewe leaned across the table and said, "Iris . . . you've never looked more beautiful."

"You always say that."

"It's always true. That heavenly blue suits you. There's something mysterious and enchanting about the lights in your hair."

"My new shampoo," she murmured.

"You're a remarkably serene woman."

"Am I?" She thought: That's all you know about it.

"One feels that life has handled you gently . . . that it always will."

"Life," she said, "the expensive surgeon."

"Nothing has been cut out of you."

"Nothing was in to begin with."

"Cynical to-night?"

"No."

"Downcast?"

"No," she lied. One didn't admit it at dinner.

"Bored and tired of it all?"

"How can you, Carewe? With all my good friends about me?"

"Humph," Carewe said, and attacked his soup. She caught a shrewd, friendly gleam in his eye as he lifted the soup spoon to his mouth.

Tony said in an undertone: "Not so dumb, Carewe."

"He isn't," she said. "There's something really real about him."

Coffee was served on the terrace. There was a new moon over the garden . . . a slip of a thing, slender, crescent shaped, gleaming palely around the edge of a fast moving gray cloud. Mrs. Wyndham sat down beside Iris. "When the guests have retired," she said, "your father wants to see you in the library."

Iris nodded. She looked out at the garden. A faint scent of roses came wafting gently to her. Carewe said: "The roses are heavy to-night. You only get it when the wind is in the right direction."

"That rose-garden is like a lovely girl passing you wearing expensive scent," Iris said. "I always have the same sensation."

Carewe was silent for a moment. He leaned forward and touched her hand. His strong, dark face showed a trace of emotion. "Iris," he said, "you're not happy."

"Why do you say that?"

"I can see it. It's in your eyes . . . in the curve of your mouth."

"Heavens, is it drooping at the corners?"

"Not that. I can't place it. I know you're not happy."

"You're sweet, O'Ferrall," she said impulsively. "It's nice of you to notice."

"How can I help noticing? I know every shade of your character. I know every little mood. I'm in love with you."

It was a complete shock to her. She stiffened a little. "Don't . . . don't make fun of me, O'Ferrall. I'm not in a joking mood."

"Neither am I. I mean it. I've been in love with you for years . . . since you were a tot."

Iris' eyes closed, and her long black lashes tightened imperceptibly on her cheeks. "I'm sorry," she said finally, opening them.

"That's all you can say?"

"What do you want me to say?"

"I want to ask you to marry me," he said helplessly. "I've been fighting for courage ever since I came."

"I'm fond of you, O'Ferrall, but . . ."

"But you don't love me," he said. "I didn't think you did. I . . . I won't bring it up again."

"I'm sorry."

"There's nothing for you to be sorry about, child." Carewe was his usual unperturbed self.

"It's not your fault that you're lovely and desirable."

"You see," she said, "I'm going to marry some one else."

Carewe started and his eyes jerked to Athelstan who stood, a gaunt silhouette against the sky. "Not . . . that . . . not Athelstan?"

"Yes."

"Iris!"

"Well?"

O'Ferrall Carewe was a gentleman. He realized that he had overstepped the boundary line between friendship and familiarity. He colored. "I'm sorry, Iris," he said. "I was a bit surprised. When is it to be announced?"

"Not for a long time, O'Ferrall. I'm a bit surprised myself. I have to get used to it."

It was ten o'clock when she joined her parents in the library. Tony was there. Athelstan was leaning against the mantel, tugging at his mustache. She thought with a wave of revulsion that she wished he would tug it off and have done with it. Tony jumped up as she entered and came to her. "I crashed this party," he said, "and I'm sticking through it. Don't let them throw me out."

"What's it about?"

"I'm not sure, but I'm sure it's deadly."

"We'll see it through," she said, "whatever it is."

Her father cleared his throat. "Sit down, Iris, my dear."

She sat down and Tony sat down beside her, holding her hand tightly. Mrs. Wyndham smiled at them from her chair. Her small, pointed face wore a layer of anxiety. Her white little hands were clasped in her lap, but the very tenseness of their clasp denoted a certain excitement.

Anthony Wyndham said: "Iris, we are very pleased about your engagement."

"I am glad, father," she said. Tony's hand tightened on hers.

"The real reason for requesting this interview," Anthony Wyndham said nervously, "is to set a definite date for the announcement. We are having a pageant for Athelstan to-morrow night, as you know. Your mother thinks it would be nice to announce it at the end of the pageant."

Iris quivered and Tony glared at his father. "I say," he burst out, "why do you shove the kid into it this way? Give her time to get her breath, won't you?"

"I can't see, Anthony," his father said, "that there is any reason for that outburst. You were not asked for your opinion. You were not asked to join us here."

"I came on my own invitation," Tony said, "and while I'm here I'm going to say what I think, with all due respect to you."

"Then restrain your thoughts as much as possible."

"I don't wish to have the engagement announced yet, father," Iris said. She looked at Athelstan. "I'd much prefer waiting."

"Hang it all, Iris," Athelstan said, "I feel that it is foolish to wait. I loathe long engagements. They are senseless and useless. To-morrow night would be the appropriate time for the announcement, it seems to me."

"And if it seems inappropriate to me," Iris said steadily, "that is unimportant?"

"Iris is getting married, too, after all," Tony said, glaring at the duke.

"Anthony! If you do not restrain yourself, I shall have to ask you to leave the room."

"I want him here, father," Iris said.

"Have you any logical reason for postponing the announcement?"

"The most logical in the world. I do not want it announced."

"I insist that you are being childish. I'm sure Athelstan thinks so."

Tony jumped up. "What the hell difference does it make what Athelstan thinks? If Iris doesn't know whether she wants the engagement announced or not, it's his place to stand by her, not to stand by and watch her forced into it. I won't stand for it!"

"Leave the room, Anthony!"

"I will not. If you want me out of the room,

call some of your servants and have them throw me out. I'll make a pretty scene for you while they're doing it. The servants' hall will ring, I'll promise you that!"

"Then sit down. This is not a declaration of war."

"It's worse," Tony said, "it's deliberation about murder."

"Are you insinuating that by marrying me, Iris is going to be murdered?" Athelstan demanded.

"Unless Iris goes into it willingly, she's licked. You can't do it. You've no right to."

"Tony, let me talk to them." Iris tugged at him with gentle but insistent hands. Tony sat down.

"Father," Iris said, "this is my marriage. It is my life. I have a right to make my own decisions."

"But I don't see the point in . . ."

"There isn't any point in it. It is illogical and feminine. . . ."

"Synonymous," her father said.

"It may seem childish and . . . and silly, but I feel that my engagement should be announced when I decide that it is to be announced."

"Iris. . . ." Iris looked at her mother. "Don't be *ridiculous!*" Mrs. Wyndham's face was hard with disappointment. "Why should it be postponed? Think how picturesque it will be to-morrow night at the pageant!"

Iris started to laugh, almost hysterically. "Dear mother," she said, between the gasps that came from her throat, "I can't be picturesque for you . . . when the time comes, if you like, we'll hire trumpeters and announce the engagement from the rooftops after the trumpeters have blared for silence! That would be picturesque, wouldn't it? And when the first son and heir comes, we'll announce that from the rooftops with a blare of trumpets and hire workingmen to stand in the streets shouting, 'Long live the new duke of Athelstan!'"

Tony could not keep still any longer. He snapped, "Picturesque, my eye! You'll get Iris into a mess of people dressed in velvet and crowns and make her picturesque because it pleases your sense of the theatrical. Be unhappy, Iris. Be married before you want to . . . desert your husband for another man . . . have your name dragged through the Sunday supplements, but be picturesque all through it or you're not a Wyndham. What a lousy system!"

"Hush, Tony," his mother said.

"Hush, Tony. Here's your bottle. Don't try to settle the problems of older people. Run along and play in the sand with little Marianne, and be polite to her. Well . . . I won't. Iris is my sister and she means more to me than any one else in the whole rotten layout. I won't hush."

"Hush, Tony darling," Iris said, reaching up

again, and Tony hushed. He sat on the davenport beside her, looking miserable. The duke came over and sat down beside them.

"I say," he said, tugging vigorously at a stray wisp. "Don't you think we're going through a lot of unnecessary . . . ah . . . drama? I'm beginning to think you don't want to marry me at all, Iris."

"Don't be ridiculous, Athelstan. Mother, stop sobbing."

"H-how can I help sobbing when I see you sitting there being . . . being difficult? Just being difficult, that's all. You don't mind seeing me suffer, Iris. . . ."

"After all she's sacrificed for you," Tony said, knowing the next line by heart.

"Well, haven't I?" Mrs. Wyndham put her hands down and glared at Tony. "I've suffered pain . . . and anxiety bringing you up . . . lost my looks . . . everything. The dearest dream of my life is to see Iris satisfactorily married. And now, for a mere whim, she is deliberately making me suffer."

"Oh, *mother* . . ." Iris said. "Mother, how can you? It's so vitally important that I decide for myself. Can't you see that?"

"No, I can't."

Clutched by the futility of argument, convinced of her mother's adamant will, Iris was desperate. She looked from Athelstan to her father. There was no help there. They would

not listen to Tony. They would not listen to her. It was so all important . . . too important to give in.

The tears came to her eyes. She backed to the French windows and stood there, trying to speak. She found her voice finally and said: "Mother, you've always overruled me in important things. Important to me, I mean. You're not going to this time. I'm going to take time . . . my own time, and you're going to wait for me."

"Bravo," Tony said huskily.

"You've got what you wanted. I've promised to marry Athelstan . . . but I'll wait until I'm ready to. Do you understand? Until *I'm* ready!"

Tony got up to come to her, but she stopped him with a little gesture. "Tony, darling," she said, "a minute . . . only a minute alone. Wait in my apartment for me."

She pushed the French windows open and went into the garden.

She ran rather wildly down the gravel path and stumbled through the hedge into the shrubbery. She threw herself headlong in a bed of lilies of the valley and let the tears come. The blossoms next her face were cool and comforting. Long, gasping sobs came, and quiet. Then another shuddering and sobs.

Craig, seeking relief from his thoughts by wandering through the garden, heard her. He went crashing through the hedge searching for

the sound. It must be Iris. He found her presently and stood there looking at her.

Her slim little blue figure with the arms flung out and the hands clenching and bruising white blossoms brought a stab of pity to his heart. He leaned over and picked her up gently. She tried to hide her tear-stained eyes, but he pulled her hands away. She sat there with the doleful, troubled expression of a child. He sat down beside her. "Suppose you tell me," he said.

"It's nothing . . . just nervousness."

"That is a lie," he said.

"Yes," she admitted.

"What is it?"

"What could interest you about it?"

"I *am* interested."

"I've a headache."

"Iris." He took her shoulders in his two hands and turned her around facing him. She could not meet his eyes. "Iris, you're crying over your engagement. I can tell you what the trouble is."

"You're very presumptuous, Craig."

"I'll be even more presumptuous. You not only are not in love with your fiancé, but you hate him. You are in love with me, Iris Wyndham."

"Craig . . . how dare you?"

"I dare because you must know it. It's another factor in your fight. Don't . . . don't refuse to think about it, Iris, face yourself when you're alone. Face facts . . . it's hard, but it's

the only thing that brings happiness. I swear it."

She was a Wyndham. She had been brought up in the traditions of the Wyndhams. She stood up. "Craig," she said, "leave me here alone."

"You can't send me away because you're ashamed," he said gently. "You can't escape that easily, Iris."

"I am not trying to escape."

"Yes, you are. You are running away from your own emotions."

"Who are you to talk of my emotions? What do you know of my emotions? Since when have my emotions been the topic of discussion in the servants' quarters?"

"I have never mentioned your name in the servants' quarters, much less discussed it."

"You . . . you have stepped over a line tonight."

"I have not stepped over," he said, "I have only reached over and touched you. Some day . . . I will step over."

"Oh, insolence! Leave me at once!"

Just then the petulant tones of Athelstan cut the silence. "Iris . . . I say . . . Iris! This night air is bad . . ." the voice wavered into thin silence and he stood staring. He had seen Craig and Iris standing there. He crossed the walk and came through the hedge, straight to the flower bed. "This night air," he said, ignoring Craig, "is apt to be injurious. Don't you think

we'd better go in?" For a brief moment, his eyes caught Craig's and held. Athelstan's glance held hatred, Craig's contempt.

Iris put her hand through Athelstan's arm. "Thank you," she said softly, "I . . . will go in."

She went away without a backward glance.

CHAPTER IX

"You don't seem yourself, Athelstan," Iris said. They were standing on the rear terrace.

"I feel a bit nervous about this silly pageant." He was mopping his forehead.

"I should think you'd be excited at a pageant depicting the finest traditions of your family."

The duke pulled the ends of his mustache. "You see, it makes me a bit self-conscious—having the history of my family exhibited before strangers."

"But they're not strangers," Iris replied, sharply.

"Oh, what difference does it make? Let's get on to the bally thing."

They walked slowly down the sloping lawn. Other couples in summer formal evening clothes were strolling toward the brilliantly lighted structure in which the pageant was to be staged.

Iris was annoyed by the nervousness of the duke. He puffed vigorously on his cigarette, tossed it away from him, lit another.

Nearing the structure which Anthony Wyndham had caused to be built for this presentation, they could hear the subdued voices of the guests. It was not usual for the guests of Wyndham

Manor to be subdued, but immediately upon entering, Iris saw the reason.

Inside, the building was painted, decorated and lighted to represent the throne room of the Restoration English kings. An enormous gilt throne was erected on a platform at one end. Heavy purple velvet swathed the platform.

The fashionably dressed guests, who were to form the audience, were grouped around the closed side of the building. The far side was open, and in the semi-darkness, many of the servants could be seen huddling together.

Iris glanced around at her friends. They were being directed by Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Wyndham, who were taking the pageant with extreme seriousness. Their own attitude was influencing the audience, and Iris felt a sense of awe which she might have experienced had she actually been in the throne room of an English king on the occasion of a dukedom being presented.

Mr. Wyndham raised his hand for silence. The chattering ceased. Three loud blasts were blown upon trumpets and two trumpeters, preceded by two pages, advanced solemnly into the room. They were guests of the Wyndhams, but from their meticulous costuming and makeup they might well have been the staff members of a ruling court.

They advanced with stately tread. Many eyes turned to the Duke of Athelstan. He held himself erect, betraying his nervousness only by an

occasional jerk at the ends of his mustache. Iris noticed that he had gone very pale.

A slender golden-haired youth, dressed in silver and gold brocade, entered, stood straight for a second, and announced:

“Make way for the king!”

Iris looked straight ahead. She, like the guests, was being drawn into the spirit of the pageant, and she almost imagined she was being present at an actual event. She stared at the open space before her, waiting for His Majesty to pass her line of vision.

Suddenly, her vision focused; she was gazing directly at a tall handsome individual who faced her. He was standing in the middle of the huddle of servants. But there was no quality of clustering together about him. He stood out as a leader. He might have been a tribal chieftain. His dark proud head was held high and he looked upon the assemblage with neither awe nor contempt; he was an interested spectator.

Iris realized that his eyes had centered upon her, were meeting her own. She heard a low murmur sweep like a breeze through the guests and she knew the king was entering. Iris tore her gaze away and watched the entrance of Charles the Second, followed by four courtiers.

The king was being played by O’Ferrall Carewe, who possessed all the physical attributes, tall and straight, broad of shoulder and with a magnificent head. He had been marvelously cos-

tuned. A ripple of admiration was heard at his appearance.

With regal composure he was seated upon the throne, his four courtiers holding his purple robe. The trumpeters and pages had taken places beside the platform.

King Charles announced to his herald, who stood waiting at the foot of the throne: "Gerald Cameron, Earl of Beresford, and the Countess Beresford."

Again the guests swung their glances toward the Duke of Athelstan. Iris had expected more gracious ease from the duke at a pageant presented in his honor. Instead he was standing with unbending stiffness and unswerving gaze. Perhaps, she thought, he was being overwhelmed by a depiction of his ancestors.

Tony Wyndham, representing Gerald Cameron, founder of the Duke of Athelstan's house, appeared. Tony looked very young and gallant and romantic, which, rumor had it, was the appearance of the young Earl who won his wife from Charles the Second. Beside him was Sheila Langfort, as the young bride who had accepted the valiant Cameron when she might have had the king.

Sheila looked beautiful, with a purely noble fragility. In her white evening gown, with its long trail, she was perfectly selected to play the rôle of the greatly beloved belle of London. Gallants and noblemen, poets and statesmen, for-

eign courtiers and merchant princes had been at her feet.

It was during the glamorous and dissipated Restoration period when the Stuart kings had been reënthroned. The beautiful girl was the toast of London. Countless duels were fought over her, men killed themselves, youths shipped to the Colonies to forget her, and she inspired a dozen plays.

According to the story, the suitors finally narrowed down to King Charles the Second, and Gerald Cameron, young Earl of Beresford. Only young Cameron, dashing and debonair, had the courage to compete with the king. To win her, he joined the service of the king, his rival.

In the wars, his reckless courage, his inspiring fervor, his cunning strategy, won important victories, made him the hero of the hour, and won for him the surrender of the belle of London. The day following their wedding they were summoned to the king.

Tony Wyndham and Sheila Langfort, as Earl and Countess Beresford, advanced slowly to the throne. They kneeled. Charles the Second cast one look of longing on the woman he had loved in vain. He said:

"Gerald Edward Christian Barrington Cameron, Earl of Beresford, Lord Hardinge, arise—Duke of Athelstan."

They arose, as the king touched him lightly

with his scepter. The king recited the services rendered him by the new Duke of Athelstan. He located the dukedom of Athelstan, in the shire of Devon, between Dunbar and Cothington. He then turned to the new Duchess of Athelstan. His expression softened, his voice trembled slightly as he spoke:

“For a bridal gift, allow me to present this bracelet, encrested with the coat of arms of Athelstan, and with a motto which it would please me to become the motto of the new dukedom: *‘Ab amore corona—A crown won by love.’*”

The king leaned forward from his throne and placed a diamond bracelet around the slender wrist of the Duchess of Athelstan.

The guests hung spellbound. They had all heard versions of the presentation of the bracelet, which had become a traditional custom to be presented to each bride of Athelstan, but it was the first time they had seen an accurate account. It was very impressive.

Iris herself had been impressed. She looked toward the present duke. His stiffness was unchanged and he stared ahead with a glassy expression. Two loud blasts were sounded upon the trumpets and the pageant was over.

Iris' gaze was drawn across the room and she felt the steady stare of Craig upon her. She met his dark eyes and encountered a strange glow. She was somewhat baffled by it. Still in the

atmosphere of the court of Charles the Second, she felt the barrier of that brilliantly lighted room between them, little in itself, but significant. She could imagine themselves transplanted to the period which had been enacted.

She would have been among the nobility, he among the commoners. He would have stood out among them, a disturbing force, as he did now. The barrier was no less real to-day, than it would have been then. But now . . . as in any time . . . he was a distinctive character, a dominant personality, who, beside the guests of Wyndham Manor, made them seem the puppets they were trying to be.

Iris fiercely resented this force in him, resented his attracting her interest. She tilted her chin slightly and attempted to stare him down.

At that moment she was brought forcibly to the scene around her by a quick silence, in which the voice of her father boomed:

"It is our pleasure to announce on this occasion, the engagement of our daughter Iris, to Dean Cameron, seventh Duke of Athelstan, Earl of Beresford, Viscount Featherstonehaugh, Lord Hardinge."

A wave of protest swept over Iris. All thoughts of another, a romantic age, vanished. Her slender white hand went to her face. Her father stepped beside her, towering above her, with his domineering smile. She raised her

rebellious glance to his and saw that he was directing her to the left.

Iris turned slowly, drawing herself up proudly. She would not allow her guests, nor Craig—who had said she loved him—to think she was being forced unwillingly. The duke leaned toward her, a fixed smile on his face. He seemed unusually pale to her, and his eyes wavered.

With a sudden gesture, he jerked from his pocket a velvet covered box, on which she saw a crest. He opened it with trembling hands and drew out a diamond bracelet. The Athelstan bracelet!

Iris stared, fascinated, as he placed it around her wrist. She felt his moist fingers. She saw the coat of arms and the jeweled motto under it. Instinctively she raised her eyes to Craig.

He had started forward. He was staring at her, his eyes widened in amazement. His face, usually so calm, twitched with agitation. She saw him unclench and clench his hand as he restrained himself from rushing toward her.

It was all in a flash and then the guests were surrounding them, showering congratulations. O'Ferrall Carewe, still in the costume of Charles the Second, said: "I *really* feel now what the king felt when his beloved married Cameron."

Iris smiled mechanically. Her smiles were not unbeautiful for being forced; to the guests clamoring about her she had never seemed more beautiful than in this regal aloofness.

"You will be married soon?" they said.

She encountered her father's commanding glare.

"Perhaps," she said.

"Yes," said Mr. Wyndham.

The duke remained beside her, his fixed smile frozen on his face. His nervousness had somewhat decreased, he seemed more sure of himself.

"Yes," he said, "if Miss Wyndham permits, we shall be married immediately."

More congratulations followed. Iris could not understand her utter lack of elation. In fact, she was depressed. It was to this end she had been educated and trained. It was the highest ambition of her set. She had certainly achieved the best.

Could it be that the words of her father's assistant gardener poisoned the fulfillment of her destiny? She knew in a blinding flash that he had not only poisoned it, he had caused her to doubt it as her destiny.

Through the throng around her she tried to glance across the room toward him. The servants were leaving. She saw a commotion. There was yelling, the servants rushed together. In the midst there was a scuffle going on, dull thuds as of blows being struck.

Craig ran toward the scuffle. The head groom, shining and glistening for the pageant, was clinging on to a writhing figure. The other servants

were milling around, some of them getting in blows at the groom's opponent.

Craig pushed his way toward the groom. "Who is it?" he demanded.

"It's that pesky reporter," panted the groom, "that put my assistant on the blink. I got him as he tried to sneak away."

Craig took the struggling fellow by his coat collar.

"The rest of you stop hitting him," Craig ordered. "Seems as though you have a keen interest in Wyndham Manor, young fellow."

"I've got more than a keen interest," Jimmie Diggs snapped. "I've got a front page story and a Sunday feature all in one."

"I wouldn't be too sure," a new voice cut in. "You know, there're laws against trespassing and Wyndham Manor has warned you that your presence would be regarded as trespassing."

"Can that. What can you do to a *Chronicle* reporter?"

"Does the *Chronicle* know where you are?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Why, we might sort of make you a guest until we're ready for the story to be made public."

"Say, who are you—Mr. Wyndham Manor himself?"

"I'm only Keenan, the special police who happens to be the head guardian of Wyndham Manor."

"Well, Keenan, if you're connected with Center Street you know you can't get away with anything like this with the *Chronicle*."

"Young man, Wyndham Manor could buy the *Chronicle* and print it for the amusement of its week-end guests. I think we'll just fix you up some nice little quarters in the lodge, where you'll be very happy."

"See here," Diggs blustered, "you can't pull that kind of stuff." He looked desperately around at the hostile faces, and saw Craig, whom he remembered as being friendly. "You, guy, look like you know something. Tell him he can't pull that kind of stuff."

Craig smiled slowly. "I think," he said, "you'd better have a good night's sleep in the lodge and be ready to talk it over in the morning. You're fighting something much bigger than the *Chronicle*."

Jimmie Diggs launched into a tirade which Keenan, the head guardian, cut short: "Take the fool away. Lock him up in the lodge. Jones, you and Bryant watch him."

Bryant wasn't present and Jones asked Craig to help him take the reporter to the lodge. Jones went inside with Ladd, the keeper, to arrange quarters for the reporter, and left him in the office room under the guard of Craig.

"Listen, guy," Jimmie Diggs whispered, "I can get you a nice roll if you sort of let me escape."

"Money doesn't tempt me," Craig grinned.

"Whatever tempts you," the reporter said desperately, "I can make it worth your while."

Craig regarded him with a speculative smile. "I wonder," he said thoughtfully.

The returning footsteps of Jones and Ladd were heard. The reporter leaped up: "Come on, I swear I'll make it worth your while."

Craig held him in steely arms. He appraised him again, and said: "I'll think it over."

CHAPTER X

IRIS was restless as her maid dressed her for dinner. The new white sequin evening gown, just sent over from Chabrossa's in Paris, gave her only a faint delight. The duke had asked to see her before dinner in the small library.

It was possible that he might want to retract his marriage offer. But Iris knew that was only her hope. Most likely he would ask her about an immediate marriage. The thought was hateful to her.

She walked slowly down her private staircase to the hallway of the small library. She paused at the door. The small library was used for personal interviews and rendezvous. The celebrated collection of first editions and priceless manuscripts reposed in the main library. In this library were only popular novels, magazines, writing desks, and several heavy easy chairs.

There was one painting, behind which was a small wall safe. The personal jewelry and papers which were in frequent use were kept in that. Her father kept a modern safe vault for the valuables in little use.

Iris frowned slightly at this dread prospect and opened the door. The room was in complete

darkness, the draperies being drawn over the French windows. She started back. Since Craig, it seemed, the servants were growing more negligent.

She heard a slight noise, or thought she did. Iris stepped forward and touched the wall switch. The soft glow of shaded lamps pervaded the room. Iris stood, almost transfixed. Facing her, and blinking from the light, was Craig. He was standing directly under the painting.

"Craig!"

"Miss Wyndham." He smiled faintly.

"What are you doing here?"

"I was sent for."

She looked at the painting. It was firm against the wall. Iris returned a steady gaze to him.

"Why didn't you go to the servants' quarters?"

"I was asked to come here." His attitude was that of patient explanation.

"Who asked you?"

"His Grace, the Duke of Athelstan."

"Here—in this room?"

"Here—in this room."

Iris was annoyed. She was still annoyed from his actions of last evening when he caused her the strange doubt and agitation. But he always seemed to be popping up at odd places to freshen her annoyance. She bit her lip in consternation.

Then she forced an austere composure on her face and said:

"I'm sure there must be some mistake."

"I'm sure it isn't mine, Miss Wyndham."

"You think you never make mistakes." She was thinking of his unheard of announcement that he was the man she loved.

"I haven't yet," he said. He smiled ironically and she knew he too was thinking of his remark to her. An impossible man.

The duke entered at that moment.

"Iris," he said questioningly, glancing at Craig.

"This man has told me that you asked to meet him here."

"Absurd," said the duke, jerking the end of his mustache.

"Will you explain that?" Iris demanded.

"I received a note, with the Athelstan stationery, signed Dean Cameron, Duke of Athelstan, requesting that I appear here at this time."

"Have you got the note?" Iris asked.

"I'm sorry. I threw it away as unimportant."

"Rot," snorted the duke. "Is it likely that on our rendezvous, Iris, I should want this person to be a third?"

Iris glanced toward Craig. He did not seem hurt by the thrust; he seemed rather amused. His old bantering manner.

"Craig," she said, not unkindly, "you may go."

"Thank you, Miss Wyndham." He bowed.

"And say," the duke drawled affectedly, "I

wouldn't go about announcing you had been honored by receiving a communication from me."

"Yes, your highness, Duke of Athelstan, Earl of Beresford, Viscount Featherstonehaugh, Lord Hardinge." He bowed very low, and Iris saw again that amused twinkle in his eyes.

"Craig," Iris said sharply, "I told you to go."

He left through the French windows.

"Bally queer," the duke said, "that fellow should be here, with his extraordinary story."

"It does seem a bit odd." Iris was thinking fast.

"By the way, isn't this the room in which your personal jewels are kept?"

"Yes," she said in a low voice.

"Don't you think it might be a rather wise idea to examine your safe?"

Iris hesitated. It didn't seem possible that Craig could be a thief. Yet, she had heard of society crooks and if he were one, it would explain much about him which was now a mystery. Also, if everything was safe it would absolve him from suspicion.

She touched the hidden catch which caused the painting to swing outward. The duke pulled his mustache vigorously. Iris swiftly turned the combination. She opened the small safe, revealing the four compartments: her own, her mother's, her father's and Tony's.

She drew out her drawer. She saw the several boxes containing rings, necklaces, bracelets,

a tiara—but nowhere the encrested purple box containing her engagement present. Iris pulled the drawer out of the safe and hurriedly examined each box.

The duke rushed forward. "What is it?" he exclaimed.

"It's gone," breathed Iris. "Your bracelet."

"My God! The Athelstan bracelet . . . it's been in our family since the reign of Charles the Second!"

They faced each other across the drawer. Iris' beautiful face was quite pale.

"That fellow, that gardener person, has it," cried the duke. "We must catch him before he leaves the grounds. Arouse the family. Send wide the alarm. Oh, my lord, the wedding present of my forebears."

Iris looked at him with disdain. "Control yourself, Athelstan. I will handle the matter myself."

"What can you do?"

"I'll go to his quarters and if he has the bracelet . . . I'll get it."

"What! You enter the quarters of that desperado. You'll be murdered."

"I don't think so," Iris smiled strangely.

"I insist upon telling the Manor." The duke was very excited.

"You shall do nothing of the kind." Iris might have been talking to royalty, but where her wishes were concerned there was no superior.

"You leave the matter to me. Do you want the whole estate to know our gardener can walk in and steal my bracelet?"

The duke pulled his mustache and glowered. He wanted to say something imperious. But he was looking at a copper-haired princess, whose regal beauty held more imperiousness than he had ever encountered.

"Do as you will," he said sullenly. "But if you fail, I shall immediately spread the alarm."

"If I fail you may spread the alarm," she replied coldly.

Iris walked rapidly toward the garage. It was a large, handsome building, on the second floor of which the chauffeurs and the two assistant gardeners had their rooms. At the garage entrance Iris realized it would seem peculiar for her to be entering a servant's room. She hardly knew why she had insisted upon handling this herself.

She walked around to the rear of the building and ascended the stairs to the second floor. She knew that she did not want to see Craig disgraced, that it was of extreme importance to her that he should admit his guilt to her. She wanted it to be a secret between them.

She knocked at the assistant gardener's door and there was no answer. She knocked again. Could he have already fled with his booty? She opened the door and entered the room.

It was the same plainly furnished, scrupu-

lously clean room as all the servants occupied—but it had a different atmosphere. Iris observed personal touches which belonged to him. There was a handsome reclining chair, modern, tasteful, expensive. On the desk was a beautiful table lamp, reflecting its glow upon a pile of the stationery she had noticed in his letter.

On his chest of drawers were silver mounted military brushes, an elaborate manicuring set, and a picture. In the corner Iris saw a number of books stacked neatly on his little table, and several magazines.

He was no ordinary gardener! She felt certain now that his life was explained. If he were the society crook, considering what had passed between them, she wanted this episode to be completed between them. There was a romantic color about it. Not exactly the sort of romance about which she had dreamed, but more than anything which had ever happened in her outlined life.

She looked closer at the picture. The silver frame was beautifully wrought and designed, and at a glance she knew it was expensive. But the girl in the photograph was more beautiful, more genuine as a woman, than any frame Iris had ever seen as a frame. In the corner, in a delicate hand, was written: "Always yours, Judith."

Judith. The name on the letter he had written. Judith Spottswood, some place in Virginia.

Iris was furious. Furious with him, herself, her little romance, at everything. She heard a

slow, even tread in the hall. She thought she recognized his steps. She looked frantically around.

The door was open and Craig walked in. Not by a flicker did he betray any surprise at her presence. He said: "This is an honor."

"I came to see you on business," she said tensely, "and I decided to wait for you."

"I'm so sorry not to have been here to receive you. Please let me fix some coffee. . . ."

"I didn't come here for coffee, as you know. I came here for the bracelet."

"Is this a new game?"

"I'm not interested in game—with gardeners. I want the Athelstan bracelet which you took from the library safe."

"My reputation demands that I must be ever alert, but this time I'll admit I am baffled."

"I have no time to bandy words," Iris said fiercely. "My engagement bracelet was in the wall safe this afternoon. No one was seen in the room but you. You were there on a palpably false excuse. The bracelet was missed after you left. Will you please give it to me?"

"I'm sorry to appear disobedient or unmanageable, but I cannot give you the bracelet."

"You have already disposed of it?" Iris exclaimed.

"I have never had it," he said quietly, noticing her growing excitement.

"Oh, don't you see, I'm not trying to convict

you of anything. I know you have the bracelet. Just give it to me and it will be all right."

"Miss Wyndham, I have frequently protested, there is nothing in my power I wouldn't do for you. But I cannot give you what I haven't got."

"What were you doing in the library?"

"I've explained that."

"That's such a weak explanation when the duke has denied having sent for you."

"That's my story and I'm going to—"

"Don't be silly," she interrupted. "Do you realize if you do not give me the bracelet an alarm will be spread and you will be arrested?"

Iris had raised her voice to an excited pitch, her lovely face was flushed, she moved with quick, nervous gestures.

Craig looked at her keenly. "Face the matter with cold and unfallacious logic," he said. "You entered the room when it was dark. I had no flash light. I do not know the combination of your safe. How, in the dark, without tools, could I have opened your safe? Why should I have remained there? Why shouldn't I have left the estate immediately?"

Iris faced him. At this explanation her excitement seemed to increase. "You see," she cried, "unless you produce the bracelet the loss will be made public and you will suffer. It is your safety I am thinking of."

Their eyes met and he read the truth of her

words. It was of him she was thinking. "Do you wish me to go away," he said gently.

"No!" she said passionately. "Not that!"

Their gazes clung. In her speech he saw revealed her personal interest. In her eyes he saw revealed more than personal interest. Her bosom rose and fell. Her full red lips were parted.

"Iris," he said. "Miss Wyndham." He stepped forward and took her slender hand in his.

She raised her eyes, which had looked at his strong hand as it took her own. She was mad to stand here in the gardener's quarters allowing him to hold her hand. How sweet "Iris" sounded when he said it. No one had ever spoken her name like that.

She knew she desired him to call her that, again and again. She also knew that she was being very foolish. Suppose some one should see her. Suppose the duke should come over to see what was happening.

The thought of the duke recalled her mission. She withdrew her hand. She wanted to explain her passionate outburst, wanted to explain her intimacy. Instead, she said:

"What will you do?"

She saw he was not thinking of what he would do. He was looking at her as many men had before . . . but none exactly like this. The screen of mockery was lifted from his eyes. The depth and intensity of feeling revealed frightened her.

She wanted him to speak, but she was afraid. She watched his mouth tighten. He was restraining himself with difficulty. She said: "What will you do?"

"Don't worry." His voice was low.

"But you will be arrested."

"I don't think so."

"What can you do to prevent it?" She was asking him if he planned to leave.

"I can handle this situation all right. I did not take the bracelet. They must discover who was in the library before me."

Iris was silent for a moment. "I must go," she said.

He did not reply, but continued to gaze into her eyes with that intensity which aroused her so strangely.

"I am late for dinner." She was partly telling herself.

"I am sorry you must go," he said softly.

She didn't move, standing still, held by his gaze. In the little room, removed from the turmoil and affectations of the Manor, she felt drawn into a quiet circle of intimacy. Something had been awakened in her by this man. By all her standards it should be denied, yet everything in her cried for its expression.

Iris glanced quickly around the room, moving toward the door.

"You are very comfortable," she said in an attempt to leave casually.

Craig stepped forward. She read in his eyes his welling emotion. His mouth twitched.

Iris faced him for a moment. He must not touch her again. She backed to the door and turned the knob. "Good-by," she murmured.

Craig looked at the striking picture she made, her patrician slenderness poised against the door, her copper head flung high.

CHAPTER XI

THE Duke of Athelstan paced up and down the room nervously. He continually tugged at his mustache. Iris reclined in a chair, watching him. She was giving a good imitation of looking bored.

"I think," she said languidly, "I should be the one to be excited about the disappearance of my bracelet."

"To you it is only a present; to me a tradition. Do you realize it has been in our family since—"

"—The reign of Charles the Second," she interrupted. "If you forgot that for a while we might think clearly about the bracelet."

"It doesn't need clear thinking," he snapped. "I know that gardener fellow has it and I know you want to protect him."

"Don't talk rot. I don't want the news of a theft to be widespread."

"It had better be widespread than that the bracelet be lost."

Mr. Anthony Wyndham IV, and Mrs. Wyndham entered at that moment.

"Ah," said the duke, "I am glad you could see me now. I regret to report that the Athelstan

bracelet, my engagement gift to Iris, has been stolen."

"Impossible!" thundered Mr. Wyndham.

"How silly!" cried Mrs. Wyndham. "It couldn't have."

"Last evening before dinner I met Iris in the small library. When we entered, one of your servants, that assistant gardener, was in the room. He had some cock and bull story about me having sent for him. A stupid concoction and, of course, he had no proof."

"But what about the bracelet?" Mrs. Wyndham said.

"Pardon me, but I'm coming to that."

"In his own little way," Iris said.

Mr. Wyndham shot a stern glance toward her.

The duke continued: "The point is, after he left we discovered the bracelet to be missing."

"The rascal," exclaimed Mrs. Wyndham.

"Why hasn't he been arrested by Keenan?" demanded Mr. Wyndham.

The duke cast a triumphant glance toward Iris. She said:

"I did not want the news to be broadcast that my jewels were so accessible or that such things happen in the Manor."

"Quite right," said her father. "What have you done?"

"I went to the gardener—"

"In his quarters!" cried her mother, horrified.

"In his quarters, mother. They were very nice

clean quarters. I told him he was suspected. He swore he was innocent. I believe him."

"You believe an assistant gardener who says he is innocent," her father shouted. "Have your senses left you?"

"I believe him to be innocent," Iris retorted with spirit.

"Now," groaned the duke, "he's probably in New York, pawning the bracelet which has been in my family since—"

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted Mr. Wyndham. "The problem now is to see that it remains in the family."

He jerked the cord savagely. Bowles appeared.

Mr. Wyndham said: "If that assistant gardener—what's his name?—Craig, is still on the estate, have him sent in immediately."

A little sigh escaped Iris.

"Don't you think we ought to send for Keenan?" said Mrs. Wyndham.

"Keep it among ourselves if we can," Iris protested.

"We'll see what he says first," Mr. Wyndham decided.

The duke resumed his paces of the room. Shortly after Craig was announced by Bowles. Craig had not had time to clean up, and he was a little mussed. His dark hair hung across his left temple. Iris noticed the way his hair was mussed. He glanced toward her and for a moment their

eyes met in understanding. Iris immediately looked away and Craig faced Mr. Wyndham.

"You sent for me, sir."

"Yes, my man. I want to know what you know about the disappearance of Miss Wyndham's engagement bracelet from the library safe."

"Nothing," said Craig.

"What's that?"

"I said I know nothing about it."

"See here, we'll get nowhere with those answers."

"I don't want to get anywhere, sir."

"It seems that you're given to insolence, my man."

"I'm sorry if you think so, sir."

Wyndham regarded him closely. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

"It's possible. I've been working around here for several weeks."

"I mean somewhere else."

"That's possible too. I've been other places."

Mr. Wyndham's face worked in an unpretty manner. Iris knew the danger signals. He was losing his temper. She was enjoying seeing Craig handle her domineering parent so successfully. Had she not been nervous for him, she would have smiled.

She suppressed the smile which played around the corners of her mouth. She must be careful not to cause suspicion of her acquaintance with

the gardener. She felt as though there was some intimate contact between them, something precious. He was the only person on the place who was not awed and impressed by all the grandeur.

Her father said: "I see you are a difficult fellow. We're giving you a chance to talk. If you refuse to talk, we'll turn you over to the police and perhaps they can make you talk."

"What do you want me to say?"

"I want to know what you've done with the bracelet."

"I know nothing about it, sir."

"All right, phone for Keenan. We'll turn him over to the police."

"What am I being arrested for?"

"For the theft of the Athelstan bracelet."

"You realize you are risking suit for false arrest?"

"My word," drawled the duke.

"What do you know about false arrest?" demanded Wyndham.

"If you arrest me, I will gladly demonstrate my knowledge."

Mr. Wyndham watched him closely. "I have seen you somewhere before."

"Thank you, sir."

"That required no answer."

"Excuse me, sir."

"I see nothing to do but dismiss the fellow and put him under the surveillance of the police from the moment he leaves. In that way he'll never

get a chance to materialize on it and if he has it hidden anywhere they'll find it. Does that suit you, Athelstan?"

"Perfectly." The duke pulled his mustache with satisfaction.

Iris thought rapidly. He must not leave. It seemed of utmost importance to her that he be near. If he left she might never see him again. She could not allow her parents to know that. She must think of a logical reason for wanting him to stay.

"I think, as long as it is my bracelet, I might have something to say." Her voice was cool and aloof. "The man obviously stole the bracelet. He must have it well secreted. Why not keep him here, make it impossible for him to leave the grounds, and keep him under constant watch? If he goes away, there is a possibility that he might elude the police. Here, we have him."

"Very reasonable," said Mr. Wyndham.

Iris glanced casually toward Craig. His composed expression was unchanged but she saw the pain her remark caused him by the contraction of his eyes. He turned one hurt look toward her, then faced Mr. Wyndham, the pain hardening into hauteur. Iris realized he had accepted her words at face value. He had not known she wanted him to stay near her.

Mr. Wyndham said: "You will wait here, until our men have had an opportunity to make a thorough search of your quarters."

Craig did not reply. Mr. Wyndham called the lodge on the estate phone and spoke with Keenan. "Will you have Jones and Bryant search the quarters of Craig, the assistant gardener, for the Athelstan bracelet? We suspect him of having stolen it."

Iris arose with a pretense of boredom. "Well, I guess the show is over."

"Allow me to accompany you," said the duke, following her from the room.

Craig's glance grew hard as he watched the duke leave and his jaw formed into a grim line.

Wyndham said: "If you are wise you will not try to escape, my good man."

Craig glared at him. Then he said tauntingly: "Some day I'll tell you where you saw me."

Mrs. Wyndham said: "Please leave, Anthony, that person depresses me."

Mr. Wyndham rang for Bowles. "Bowles, will you and Graham watch this man for five minutes? Then let him go."

Bowles and Graham stood at unease in the Wyndham Manor drawing room. Craig lounged in a chair and lit a cigarette.

"Hey, Craig," said Graham, "you shouldn't do that in here."

"There's an effective ash tray by my side, the cigarettes are my own, and no 'No Smoking' signs are posted. Can you give me a logical reason for not smoking?"

"It don't look right."

"Ignore him," Bowles said loftily.

"Bowles," Craig said, "some day I'm going to have you for a butler."

Bowles lifted his nose a little higher.

"You're a wise guy," said Graham.

"Ignore him." Bowles looked at the ceiling.

Craig arose, stretched, and extinguished his cigarette. He said: "Well, so long, Bowles. You're a little tiresome."

Bowles glanced at his wrist watch. "Only three and a half minutes have passed. Detain him, Graham."

Graham stood in front of Craig. Craig looked him over with exaggerated appraisal. He said: "Graham, you're a nice looking fellow. I'd hate to spoil you. You'd better stand aside. I said I was bored."

Graham looked toward Bowles. "Shall I ignore him?" he asked.

Bowles saw a gleam in Craig's eye he did not relish.

"Ignore him," he replied.

"Bowles," said Craig, "sometimes you do display something akin to human intelligence."

Craig walked quickly toward his quarters. He imagined what those two Wyndham Manor guards were doing to his place. Bryant was a former New York detective, brought on by Keenan. Jones was a professional estate guardian, who prided himself on being tough.

On the stairs Craig could hear the sounds of

ransacking in his room. Even that did not prepare him for the wreckage he beheld. Every drawer was out of the chest and desk, on the floor, with all the contents spread out. His clothes from the closet, which he always kept so meticulously, were strewn all over the room. His books had been pulled from the table and turned outward and dropped.

As he entered they were pulling the bed apart. Craig said nothing. He could not trust himself to speak. He stood very still and watched them, the blood beating in his head.

They finished with the bed and rolled back the rugs. They kicked things around a little. They stood up and faced him.

"Come on, guy, cough up, where have you got it hidden?"

"You seem to have done a thorough job," Craig replied.

"None of your lip now," said Jones. "You want us to give you the third degree?"

"I want you to try," Craig replied tensely.

"Tough guy, eh?" sneered Bryant.

"Maybe."

"Let's give him the third degree," Jones said.

"Let's give him the third degree, then frisk him," said Bryant.

Craig said nothing. He watched them advance on him.

"I want to give you guardians a little friendly advice," he said. "You're not acting on any au-

thority and this is entirely personal. You should be careful in your personal actions; you haven't got Wyndham Manor behind you."

"We don't need anything behind us when we're dealing with a guy like you."

"Let's give him the third degree," Jones said.

"You're a tough fellow, aren't you," Craig said.

"Listen, guy," Bryant said, "we're giving you a chance to cough up. If you want to be hard, we'll be hard."

"I have nothing to cough up—as you so neatly phrase it."

"None of that stuff, bozo," Jones said. "If you don't want the third degree, keep your face."

"You sort of think the third degree will be a lot of fun, don't you," Craig said.

"Aw, I got enough of this bird's mouth. Let's frisk him," Bryant cut in.

"We're going to frisk you," Jones snarled, "and if you don't come through we're going to give you the third degree."

"I don't think I want to be frisked."

"Who the hell cares what you think, a dirty crook."

"I don't like that remark," Craig said evenly.

"It don't make no difference what a gardener likes," Jones said.

"It makes a difference what I like," Craig said.

"Ritzy, eh. Well, let's show him what we think of ritzy guys."

"Are you coming through, guy?" Bryant said.

"I'm waiting on your pleasure, *gentlemen*."

"Let's give it to him," Jones snarled.

They advanced on him. Craig watched them warily, with a pretense of carelessness. He said:

"At your own risk."

Bryant grabbed for his arm and Jones charged in. Craig jerked his arm back and dodged under Jones. Jones rushed past, stumbling over Craig's foot. Craig's arm shot up in a six-inch jab, connecting with Bryant's face. It was a terrific impact and Bryant staggered back.

Craig spun around and met Jones as he lunged in. They clinched and staggered around the room, both struggling for a hold. Bryant recovered and approached cautiously, looking for a point of attack. Jones pushed heavily and tried to force Craig's back to Bryant.

Craig allowed Jones to force his back to Bryant. Bryant prepared himself for a spring. Suddenly Craig caught Jones in a fierce grasp. It was unexpected and Jones was flung off his feet. While Jones was in midair, Craig hurled him into Bryant.

Bryant crashed to the floor and Jones staggered back, stumbling over Bryant. Craig leaped in. He was like an unleashed tiger. The pent-up fury was released on the two guards, who fought with the desperation of cornered rats.

They kicked and clawed, gouged at his eyes, bit. Nothing stopped him. He was a whirling demon, sweeping havoc in his path. His fists shot out with machinelike precision, landing with sickening thuds. A grim smile came on his face, his eyes narrowed into flaming slits.

Bryant fell unconscious from an overhand right that flashed ten inches before it connected. Jones picked up an overturned straight chair and threw it at Craig. Craig caught it. He slowly placed it on the floor and advanced on Jones. Jones, the tough guy, blanched, he wet his lips. Then he fled toward the door.

Craig tackled him as he pulled the door open.

"Wait a minute," Craig said. "You forgot something."

"What?" Jones chattered.

"That bunch of junk." He pointed to Bryant, who was stirring and feebly trying to raise himself to his feet.

Jones dragged Bryant across the room. Craig stood by while Jones hauled him through the door. At the head of the landing, Bryant mumbled, "I'll get you for this."

"I'm waiting for a return visit," he said. "And . . ."

He paused. In his anxiety to evade what seemed a threatened blow, Jones had pulled Bryant vigorously, lost his balance, and they both tumbled down the stairs. They rolled over,

bounced, bumped, slid, and came to a painful stop.

They raised themselves and looked up at Craig. "I was saying," Craig continued in his calm voice, that was now as hard as steel, "when you come again, remember you are calling on a gentleman."

They started away. Craig looked toward the vestibule. Standing in the front of a huddle of curious servants, was Iris. Iris was staring straight at Craig.

Craig rushed down the steps. She had been the cause of this search and fight. He stared into her eyes. Whatever he expected to find, he didn't. He saw the steady glow which looked upon him and accepted him, established a contact between them.

Her beautiful face was expressionless. Her lovely red mouth was firm in its regal composure. Only her eyes, so steady on him, admitted him. He felt a depth in her unsounded, an inscrutability beyond his comprehension.

His anger died in him. He was gazing at something too mysterious, too enormous in force, for him to combat by ordinary reactions of anger. Her beauty overwhelmed him.

He forced an evenness in his voice as he said: "I am sorry to be the cause of a disturbance which must have displeased you. It was not my fault. I was incited; I only protected my rights."

Iris could detect no bantering in his manner.

His eyes were serious when he raised them from his low bow. She turned slowly away. The servants parted and she walked through them.

Craig watched her gorgeous slenderness as she vanished. He sighed deeply. This was the kind of woman he had never expected to meet, who could stir his whole being until he was helpless in the grip of an emotion, greater than himself.

CHAPTER XII

CRAIG couldn't work up much enthusiasm in the rose-bush he was tending. It was lonesome work, at best. Now with a bulky figure forever lurking in the background, Craig was unhappy. He poked around the dirt with his trowel, watching the Manor from the corner of his eye.

Not for two days had he seen Iris. Lately, he always thought of her as "Iris." Lately, he seemed to think about nothing but her. He had seen her crossing the terrace with the duke once. But then he had a glimpse only of her slender grace, and her copper-colored hair moving lightly in the breeze.

He longed to see her face, her beautiful exquisite face. He longed to have her gray eyes warm upon him. His guardians did not allow him near the Manor. They also prevented him from going near the outskirts of the Manor.

He had no intention of escaping, anyway not until he could talk to her again. He flung down the trowel and stalked across the gardens. The heavy figure unobtrusively followed.

At the point where the gardens ended and the rear terrace began, the individual intercepted Craig.

"I wouldn't go any nearer," said the man.

"I beg your pardon," Craig replied, appraising him, "but I don't think we've met."

"That's all right about your wisecracks. I'm Flournoy, sent up from the city to keep my eye on you. And I'm going to."

"That's very nice of you, Flournoy. Shall we stroll across the terrace?"

"You're not strolling anywhere," Flournoy said mildly.

"Flournoy, don't disillusion me and admit you're one of these strong-arm men."

"I'm not being strong-arm with you, young fellow. I'm carrying something on my hip for you."

"Can you use it?" Craig was curious.

"Try me."

"I'm going to do just that. I'm going to walk across the terrace in the direction of the servants' entrance. See if you can pot me." Craig started forward at a leisurely pace.

"Stop."

Craig continued to walk.

"I'm warning you to stop."

Craig did not stop.

"I have the gat trained on you, if you take three more steps I'll fire."

Craig took three more steps, then a fourth. He had mounted the incline which placed him on the level leading into the rear court.

In the courtyard he saw the duke rush for-

ward with Mrs. Wyndham, Bowles, and the head groom. Flournoy saw them at the same time.

"Here it is five-thirty," wailed Mrs. Wyndham, "and she should have been back two hours ago. That's just like Iris. Fourteen people for a four o'clock tea and she goes off riding."

"May I suggest, ma'am," Bowles boomed, "that Miss Iris might have met with an accident? I have it from Janet, her assistant maid, that Miss Iris was expected back not later than three-thirty. Her tea gown had been laid out."

"Isn't that just like Iris," Mrs. Wyndham went on, "to have her tea gown laid out and not return to wear it."

"If I may be so bold, ma'am," offered the groom, "Miss Iris told me she was only to be gone an hour. Lady Jane was being curried for her but she said she couldn't wait. She rode Araby Belle, a bad horse sometimes."

"Good heavens!" cried the duke. "The beast might have thrown her. Mrs. Wyndham, I'll go after her. Which way did she ride, my man?"

"She rode around the lower end of the lake, sir, and into the Huntington woods. She seemed to be headed toward the grottoes. She often rides toward the grottoes."

"Why was she riding alone?" Mrs. Wyndham demanded.

"I asked to accompany her," the duke replied, "but she insisted she wanted a brisk ride all to herself."

"Isn't that just like—"

"Pardon, Mrs. Wyndham," Athelstan cut in, "but with your permission I'll try and find her."

"I don't know what to do," wailed the woman.

"Saddle me a horse, my man," ordered the duke.

"Yes, sir. Right away. Prince Hal is ready."

Craig whirled around. Flournoy was standing, uncertain, with a blunt-nosed automatic pointed toward the ground. Craig dashed down the terrace.

"Wait!" cried Flournoy, coming to life. "Where're you going?"

"To my quarters," Craig shouted over his shoulder. "Any objections?"

Down a decline of the terrace, across a level, and shooting down the last decline, Craig turned diagonally across the stretch of grass, in two leaps crossed the driveway, and continued diagonally across the lawn, skirting the garden. The stable door was open and at full speed he ran in.

He stopped himself against the stall of Prince Hal. Prince Hal stomped and half reared. He was a great black beast, long-limbed and sinewy. Young, spirited and nervous, he had never been completely broken for a riding horse because few liked to ride him. Fast as a race horse, he was hard to manage for ordinary pleasure riding.

Craig grabbed the bridle, released the catch

which caught it to the beam, and backed him out. Prince Hal trembled with excitement.

"Quiet, boy, quiet," Craig soothed him, stroking his face.

He quickly jerked off the stable bridle and fastened a riding bridle to the jerking head.

"Quiet, old man," he said.

Craig grabbed an English riding saddle, threw it across the animal, and pulled the girth together in a quick deft stroke. Prince Hal reared and jumped forward, snorting and kicking.

Flournoy appeared in the doorway. Running toward the stables, directly behind him, were the duke and the head groom.

Craig, ignoring the swinging stirrups, leaped upon the back of the charging animal. He jammed his feet in the stirrups as the beast reared high on his hind legs. Craig kicked him lightly with his heels and touched the reins.

"Go on, Hal," he cried.

Flournoy started forward, shouting, "Stop!"

Athelstan and the groom entered the doorway, both yelling.

"Look out!" Craig cried.

Prince Hal plunged forward. Flournoy dashed to one side and the groom and the duke to the other. One lunge and the beast was in the open.

"He'll be killed," screamed the groom. "Nobody but a professional could ride that horse."

"Let him," the duke said. "Saddle Lady Jane."

The groom and Flournoy stood, open mouthed, and watched the great animal cover the ground in long bounding strides. They saw him skirt the lower end of the lake. The horse took a huge rock in his leap, Craig scorning to run around it.

"Boy, look at that," said Flournoy.

"That man can ride," the groom said admiringly.

"Saddle Lady Jane, you fool," Athelstan said viciously.

Craig guided the horse through a narrow bridle path in Huntington woods. On the outskirts of the wood the path continued over rocky ground and a road diverged across a brushy field. Craig took the rocky path. He knew Iris never followed the beaten trail in her own decisions.

The path grew steeper, the going rougher. Prince Hal rushed on. On the top of the incline the path curved back toward the level. Straight ahead, on a steep decline, Craig saw a clump of thickets partially screening what looked like caves and grottoes.

He directed the beast down the rocks. The horse stumbled badly and plunged in the thickets at the bottom.

"Easy, boy," Craig said, lifting him.

The horse recovered his balance.

"Who is it?" came a voice.

It was Iris.

"Iris! Where are you?"

There was a silence. "On the other side of these messy thickets," she called.

Craig pushed the horse through. He emerged and saw her, standing on a high rock, her horse nowhere in sight. He had never seen her look so breathtaking as in her riding habit. Light brown whipcord breeches and a dark brown coat and boots, with a white silk blouse and green tie. She held her felt hat crushed in one hand and swung her riding crop in the other.

Her copper hair that he so much loved blew lightly in the wind—just as in his last picture of her. She might have been standing in her courtyard, waiting for a car. She looked so strikingly the spirited girl that she was and the . . . having finished his ride on that splendid horse it was inevitable he should think . . . thoroughbred.

"The princess in distress," he greeted her.

"I feel like a girl walking home from a motor ride, waiting for the trolley."

"Our Mrs. Wyndham is perturbed over the prolonged absence of her daughter," he said.

"Our Miss Wyndham is perturbed over the prolonged absence of her horse."

"Where is he?"

"At last, my turn to be evasive. When last I saw him he was stumbling heavily to his knees. I did have a passing glimpse of his mane as I shot over his head. Then I took a little nap, it

seems. When I awakened I found myself deserted."

"Are you hurt?" he cried, leaping from his horse.

"Don't excite yourself, Sir Galahad. There is a slight bump somewhere on my scalp, which is natural when a scalp collides with a rock."

He was beside her. "Let me find it," he said. She stood still and felt his fingers, unexpectedly gentle, run through her hair. When he touched the injured spot it gave only a slight pain.

"Hurt?" he asked.

"Hardly."

"Let me rub it."

"Don't forget you're a gardener and not a masseur."

He drew his hand away and Iris felt a sense of ended pleasure. His hand had been so soothing, and it had given her a little electric shock which no one's hands had ever given her.

"Did my mother appoint you as the rescue squad?" she said.

"Not exactly. The duke was the official life saver, but I didn't trust his ability to find you and took matters into my own hands."

"On Prince Hal."

"A noble beast," he replied.

This man became more of a mystery. Not half a dozen men of the scores who had visited the Manor had been able or cared to ride that animal.

She had seen him ride up to her with the horse under complete control.

"Riding such animals is an unusual accomplishment for gardeners," she said.

"Riding after a beautiful princess is also unusual for a gardener."

Iris jumped down from the rock. Always he evaded her questions . . . but the sting of annoyance was stilled in her pleasure in his remark. It had none of the flavor of conventional compliments, expected retorts. It was spontaneous.

He had leaped down beside her. He said:

"Let me help you on my horse."

"Prince Hal. I tried to ride him once."

"I will hold his bridle," he said.

He helped her upon the beast. Always that little shock came from the contact with his hand. He led the animal forward. Never had she seen him in such complete control. She felt a great peace. Like the moment in his room, only this was greater. They were far enough removed from the Manor to seem in a different world. If she escaped, as she had talked with Tony of doing, she would want to be away like this. And this man walking beside her. Why did she have problems? She sighed.

"My princess is unhappy," he said lightly.

"Perhaps I sigh from happiness."

"I should like to think you sighed from happiness at being here."

"With you?" she asked mockingly.

"With me."

"Is there any especial reason I should be happy to have my gardener leading my horse?"

"Iris . . ." he began in a low voice.

"Craig." It was a reprimand.

"Iris," he said the word softly, almost to himself. "In my thoughts you are 'Iris.' Out here, it seems that you are no longer my employer's daughter, but you are a woman and I a man."

His words moved her deeply. The feeling that she lived in this man's thoughts, his direct expression, brought her to that simplicity for which she had longed. All the sham she had protested against melted away; they were established on a natural basis.

She should not forget that she was Iris Wyndham, affianced to the Duke of Athelstan, and this man was her father's hired help. But the emotional contact was stronger. Her one restraint was the control she exerted over her face. She looked at him with the utmost aloofness, her haughty little chin lifted.

"Rather I should say," he continued with a humbleness new to him, "you are a princess and I her slave. You know, there was always one slave who adored his queen, one poor serf who worshiped his princess.

"It was their adoration, I fancy, which was diffused among all the slaves and made them willing to sweat blood that she might be beautiful. It took thousands of those slaves to form

one woman so beautiful. It took generations of slaves to form a woman so beautiful as you.

"All the generations of slaves are justified if one such woman as you is created. It is you who bring dreams to men. It is you who give them aspirations and hope. It is you who produce the illusion that life is worth living."

Iris was swayed profoundly. Not the smoothest of the fashionplates who had proposed to her had aroused the emotion of this man. She wanted to be beside him, she wanted to draw back from this engulfing intimacy. She said:

"These stirrups . . . they are too long. Would you mind . . ."

In one swift movement his arm was around her waist. Gently she was lifted from the horse and placed on the ground. His arm was not withdrawn, it grew tighter, and his other arm enfolded her to him. She was passionately stirred by this closeness. Her head was upon his chest.

Iris felt weak. She wanted to remain here, to nestle closer, have him hold her tighter. For one moment she was a woman held in the arms of a man who aroused her to an intensity never experienced. Almost immediately she realized it was foolhardy.

What could result from such weakness? She knew Craig was more than their gardener. But that was his actual capacity. He might be peniless, or for all her knowledge, he might be something much worse. Thus, she talked to her-

self, while deep inside she knew she was afraid . . . afraid she would be swept along on a passion whose ends she could not face. The very power of it frightened her, untrained as she was to face the primal feelings.

She raised her small hands to his chest and gently pushed herself free. He made no effort to restrain her. His eyes searched into hers, searching she knew for an answer to what she read in his.

"I must be getting back," she said.

"Yes." His voice was unnatural.

He turned his face away and bent quickly toward the stirrups. Knowing his dexterity, she thought he took an unconscionable time to adjust them.

She heard a clatter on the rocks. She looked up and saw the Duke of Athelstan bouncing toward them on Lady Jane. His face was harassed, his waxed mustache drooped, and his plastered blond hair hung in strings down his temples.

She was recalled to her own world with abruptness. As much as was the duke's appearance distasteful at this time, he served as a bridge from this mad moment to reality. Craig straightened immediately and stood beside Prince Hal.

The duke pulled his horse up savagely. He was fairly frothing with rage. He gritted out:

"Iris, what are you doing here with this—this menial?"

"He happened to find me."

"You should have sent him off immediately. Do you think it safe to be with such a man?"

"My father thinks it safe to have him around. Why not I?"

"Because he's a thief, a dangerous criminal."

Iris saw the slow flush on the face of Craig. She had a quick picture of his face the afternoon he threw the two guardians out of his room. She found her stirrup and started to mount. Craig leaned down and assisted her.

"How dare you touch Miss Wyndham?" the duke shouted.

"A cat may look at a queen." His voice had an ominous calm.

"None of your insolence, swine," the duke snarled.

Craig started forward. "Who are you to judge of swine?" he snapped.

"I'll show you," Athelstan ground out. With a sharp backhand thrust he cut his riding crop across Craig's face.

A red welt appeared down Craig's cheek. Iris saw his eyes narrow, his jaw harden into a grim line. He reached up and with one jerk pulled the duke from his horse. The duke's feet went skyward as he was pulled through the air. He would have landed on his face had not Craig thrown him violently forward, knocking his feet like an empty sack on the ground.

Athelstan's face went dead white. Iris screamed. Prince Hal plunged and reared.

"Do you dare lay a hand on the Duke of Athelstan?" the duke whimpered with a sorry assumption of dignity.

"*Are* you the Duke of Athelstan?" Craig said. His voice was low, heard only by the duke, and his lips parted slightly in a cold smile.

"What do you mean?" the duke blustered.

"I'll tell you when I have more time." He flung the man from him and sprang toward the bridle of Prince Hal, to whom Iris was clinging desperately.

"Steady, old boy." He soothed the horse.

"Thank you, Craig," Iris said in her regal manner.

"Madam." Craig bowed low.

"Shall we go, Athelstan?" she said.

"You're jolly well right." He had climbed painfully into the saddle.

They started forward at a canter. Iris gave one backward glance toward Craig. He was walking along with long, easy strides. He met her glance and she felt in that swift contact the significance of a deeper, a real, contact which was theirs.

CHAPTER XIII

FLOURNOY was joined by a grim-visaged individual from the "big town"—as he called it—by the name of Patterson. Flournoy and Patterson took positions on opposite sides of Craig. From their wrists swung leather covered wooden clubs.

Craig affected to pay no attention. Inwardly he was worried. It was impossible to see Iris. Since the afternoon of the ride he had been impelled constantly toward her. Last night, from the end of the lawn, he had watched at a supper dance.

The Duke of Athelstan was very much in evidence, bowing, strutting, and pulling his mustache. Iris was brilliant, gay, and at her social best. It was the Iris he hated to see. It was the Iris who was silencing her inner voice which bade her escape.

In that one moment in the woods, when she had clung to him, Craig knew that she was free, she was living the inner voice. At her change on the duke's appearance, he knew she had definitely stifled the voice; decided to go on through with her life as it was arranged, because escape seemed futile.

He firmly believed that she loved him. Perhaps not the full realization was in her, there were too many apparent barriers for that. But the woman beneath her scintillating shell was stirred by him.

Only by her standards and by her bonds he was impossible. In fairy stories, perhaps, a slave could release the princess; but in New York State an assistant gardener could not release the princess of a financial dynasty. She was too closely imprisoned by physical circumstances for that to be possible.

For that reason, now that he was sure he touched her, Craig was anxious for action which would bring about a crisis. It was imperative he communicate with the outside world. Here he was helpless. It was certain that his wild horse ride of yesterday was regarded as suspicious behavior. Hence, the appearance of Patterson.

He plodded through his work, not too efficiently. There was small danger of his being discharged while they feared he had the bracelet in his possession. He walked across to the garage at quitting time and cleaned himself.

After dinner with the other servants, he strolled in the general direction of the gardens. There was an infrequently used arbor in which he sometimes sat and smoked, and no objection had been offered by his superiors.

Dusk had deepened into the first shadowy darkness, unlit as yet by stars and moon. As he

neared the arbor he stopped and lit a cigar. Out of the corner of his eyes he could see Flournoy and Patterson stop, one to the right, one to the left, about twenty or thirty paces behind him. They were indistinct in the shadows.

He entered the arbor, puffing vigorously on his cigar. "The old Army game," he said to himself. He jerked a small tack from his pocket, crossed the arbor swiftly. Over his accustomed seat, against the strip of wood, he tacked his lighted cigar.

Quickly he lifted out one French window, slipped through, and replaced the window. He crept rapidly through the garden, silent as an Indian. He knew every path among the flowers and shrubs. As soon as he had the flowering almond between him and the detectives he sped like the wind through the shrubs.

At the open space between the shrubs and the lodge, he bent and ran as low to the ground as possible. As yet, he heard no sounds behind him. The lodge was lighted in the front room and in the room in which Jimmie Diggs was imprisoned.

He peeked in the front room. The lodge-keeper was playing double Canfield with Jenkins, the head groom. Craig crept along the cottage to the reporter's window. Diggs was lying on his bed, his coat off, restlessly turning the pages of a magazine.

The windows were heavily barred with iron. Craig tapped softly on the window. The re-

porter looked up, startled. Craig repeated the rapping, pressing his face between the bars. Jimmie Diggs sprang to the window and raised it.

"Easy," whispered Craig. "We've got to work fast. I'll help you escape if you will do only one thing for me—send a wire."

"I'll do anything if—"

"All right. Here's the wire. Send it immediately. The address is—"

"Sure, you don't have to draw me a diagram. Get me out of here!"

"You promise?"

"I'll sign away my life."

"I'm coming in the front door with a mask and a gun. I'll cover the two chaps in front while you beat it. Can you climb over the wall?"

"I did coming in."

"Is your door unlocked?"

"What do you think I am, a week-end guest? The door is as tight as—"

"Can you break it down?"

"I could break down the Statue of Liberty to get out of here."

"All right. Start when you hear me come in."

Craig listened carefully. There was no sound yet. He pulled out a black silk handkerchief, tied it around his face, jerked a cap he never used from his pocket, and covered his forehead. He then drew out a long blue steel revolver.

The front door was unlocked, he knew. He

opened it. A loud gong rang through the lodge. He stepped down the hall to the front room. Ladd was rushing from the room. At the doorway he ran into a tall masked figure who shoved an ugly-looking weapon in his stomach. From back in the house came the sound of a crash.

"Stick 'em up," Craig growled, disguising his voice.

Ladd backed away, his hands going into the air. The groom shoved his pudgy hands slowly upward, still sitting before the card table. Another crash came from within.

Ladd and Jenkins exchanged glances. Ladd started to speak.

"Just keep quiet, buddy, and it'll be all right."

The third crash was accompanied by a loud splintering. Ladd started forward, the groom moved.

"Not a peep outa youse guys or I'll plug you." Craig was enjoying his rôle.

The next crash broke the door in and a second later Jimmie Diggs staggered into the doorway.

Craig whispered: "Have you got the wire?"

"You can count on me, big boy."

"Fade," said Craig aloud. Diggs faded. "Stay right where you are, you bozos."

The groom was growing restless. Ladd wet his lips. In the distance, Craig heard the sounds of shouts. They had discovered his trick. "You birds stay right where you are for one minute.

I'll be on the wall and I'll pot the first man out of the house."

Then he was gone.

Iris was being very bored listening to the shrieking of Madame Stavinnella, famed Metropolitan singer. A bushy-haired accompanist was going into contortions over the piano keys.

"Marvelous!" cooed Sheila Langfort to the duke.

Tony whispered to Iris: "Prominent opera star mysteriously murdered at Wyndham Manor. Son and heir missing."

Bowles appeared at the end of the room and tried frantically to get the attention of Mr. Wyndham.

"It's gotten Bowles," Tony said.

Iris saw the butler. Her father looked over reprovingly at the whispering and Iris nodded toward the butler. Bowles beckoned apologetically. Mr. Wyndham suffered the singer to complete her aria. By way of walking around to express his uncontrolled pleasure, he sidled over to Bowles. They held a heated conversation.

The opera singer stood somewhat baffled in the middle of the room. She was amazed at the lack of applause. Then she too realized the tense atmosphere of waiting. Mr. Wyndham said:

"I must beg your pardon, madame. Some—er—little mishap has occurred which needn't concern you at all. Excuse me just a moment."

He crossed to Iris and Tony, and whispered hoarsely: "That reporter fellow has escaped. I'm awfully sorry, Athelstan, but the story of your being here and your engagement might possibly leak out now. We'll do everything to capture the fellow. Tony, will you go down to the lodge and see what is wrong? According to Bowles, Keenan is quite excited. It seems this man Craig was mixed up in it."

Iris felt their eyes upon her. "Oh," she said, "the bothersome gardener. I'll go with you, Tony, it'll break this ordeal."

Tony fetched her roadster and in a minute they pulled up in front of the lodge. They saw a scene of confusion. Jones and Bryant, Flournoy and Patterson, Keenan, Ladd and Jenkins were all talking at once. Craig was silent.

"Select a spokesman," Tony said, "and break the news gently."

The groom and Ladd insisted upon telling their own version of the tall powerful man, masked, who held a gun on them while Diggs crashed down the door, and they both escaped over the wall.

Flournoy and Patterson insisted on their separate versions of how Craig had nailed his lighted cigar to the arbor wall and fooled them into thinking he was there. It must have been he who released the reporter, they maintained.

Jones and Bryant said they had found Craig in his quarters, smoking a cigar and reading a book.

They didn't see how he could have escaped his guardians, released the prisoner, and been in his quarters all at once.

"Did it look like Craig?" Tony snapped.

"He was much bigger," said the groom.

"You imagined it," replied Patterson.

"He talked different," said Ladd.

"He used a phoney voice," replied Flournoy.

"You fellows have a nice detective story all ready between you," said Tony, "all you need is a motive."

"Why did you do it?" Keenan whirled on Craig.

"I was tired of it."

"Tired of what?"

"The cigar—I tacked on the wall."

"You fool. Why did you let the reporter go?"

"Did I do that?" Craig asked.

"You can't get nothing out of that bird," said Bryant.

"He's a wise guy," said Jones.

Iris was not amused at Craig. He was standing with his old nonchalance, the baffling smile playing on his face. She suspected him of concealing something. She knew his manner when he was sincere. She knew it too well.

Iris climbed from the car. She glanced at Craig and walked toward the wall. A good jump would allow a man to reach the top, a strong arm would pull him up. She didn't know if the reporter was either agile or strong. It

was possible that Craig had helped him over.

She glanced casually around the ground. Behind her the wrangling was getting worse. She heard Tony's voice getting bored again. She started to turn back when she stooped down. She saw a crumpled piece of paper on the ground. She picked it up.

Iris took the paper back toward the light of the house.

She heard Tony say: "I think this party should break up. The only thing you can do, Keenan, is chase him. Why don't you take your men in a car and go toward the town?"

Iris heard the sound of running feet. She read the note: "Miss Judith Spottswood, Sulgrave, Virginia. . . . Did you get the bracelet? Reply to Craig, care of Wyndham estate."

For a moment Iris was stiff with rage. Judith Spottswood, the picture, the letter . . . did you get the bracelet. . . . Oh, it was horrible! She had been deceived, taken in like any dupe. This man was a crook of the worst kind. He worked with a woman in another town. . . . She was a . . . what was the word . . . a moll. Yes, he had a moll. And he held up the lodge-keeper with a revolver to let a reporter escape.

He knew how bitterly she felt about publicity, knew it was the wish of their house guest, the Duke of Athelstan, to keep his presence a secret from the newspapers. For her and her wishes he cared nothing. It was just a cheap game with

him. "*Did you get the bracelet?*" The words seared her.

And after yesterday . . . probably part of his game. She had thought of him as symbolizing escape. What a mockery!

She walked rapidly around the corner of the house. It was not dignified to walk too rapidly. As she saw him she slowed to a stately gait. Craig was standing apart. Fournoy and Patterson were several yards behind, waiting his move. Ladd and the groom were entering the lodge. Tony was lighting a cigarette, looking around for her.

"Just a minute, Tony," she said.

She walked up to Craig.

"My princess is displeased," he said softly.

"Please try to remember that your employer's daughter prefers to be addressed as Miss Wyndham."

His eyebrows raised slightly, and the mocking mask which he formerly used quickly screened his face. He bowed.

"Can you explain this?" she thrust the note upon him.

He took it. She noticed with satisfaction that he started. His eyes narrowed for just a flash. He said lightly:

"Oh, that."

"So it does strike you on a weak spot," she flared. "Your feeble response is no explanation."

"I'm sorry," he said, "I have no explanation."

"It is just as well you save your lies. There is nothing you could say to—to this." Her voice wavered. She trembled with rage at him. It had all seemed so beautiful, and he could do this despicable thing. Oh, how she hated him.

"There is nothing I can say, Miss Wyndham."

The gentleness in his voice unstrung her.

She cried, half hysterically: "Leave the grounds at once."

"My guards prevent me."

"What silly rot. You got the reporter away. Besides, I order you to leave."

"I'm sorry, but I cannot—yet."

"You'll either leave now, this minute, or I'll expose this note, I'll—I'll expose everything I know in connection with it."

"For your sake as much as my own, I beg you not to." His voice was serious.

"My sake! What do you care about that? Will you go or must I expose you?" Her voice rose hysterically.

"I will not go."

"What's up, Iris?" yelled Tony.

She did not answer. She was stifling a sob of impotent fury. Tony vaulted out of the car and was beside Craig.

"What have you said to her?" he demanded.

Craig turned a cold steady gaze on the young man. "Ask Miss Wyndham," he replied.

Tony measured glances with him for a moment.

"Come on, Tony," Iris said in a voice of forced calm, "let's go back to the Manor."

Tony opened the door for her. As he turned the car around he said: "That chap certainly gave me a fishy eye. It almost gave me a chill."

"Oh, don't speak of him," she cried.

"What is the matter with you—behaving like this about a gardener?"

"Tony, be a dear and let me alone—to-night."

"Okay, little sister." He speeded down the last hundred yards and slithered to a stop at the courtyard.

Iris climbed out. Her composure had been regained and she walked into the drawing room with her usual poise. Madame Stavinella had concluded her concert and was departing. Mr. and Mrs. Wyndham and the duke were bidding farewells to the guests.

As the last guest disappeared, Athelstan whispered a few words to Iris' father. He smiled, patted the duke on the arm, and said, "Fine, my boy."

The duke walked over to Iris. He was tugging at his mustache with unusual vigor. He paused before her, one hand twitching by his side. Iris looked at him coldly.

"Iris," he said, his voice peculiarly high, "I can't go on without you."

She raised her eyes to him. His gaunt face was oddly restless. She saw he was perturbed. It was hardly the agitation caused by a proposal.

She didn't understand the glitter in his eyes. He seemed almost frightened.

"Surely I'm not that bad, Athelstan," she said.

"I don't understand you."

"You seem afraid of me."

He laughed forcedly. "It is rather fearsome asking you to marry me, you know. You don't seem to fancy me."

"It isn't you, it's what you stand for." She thought of Craig.

"I know your ideas about reality and all that, but I'm not a bad fellow."

Iris thought of Craig again. Her thoughts of Craig were only interrupted by the duke's remarks. "No," she said, "you're not a bad fellow."

"Then why not marry me?" he said.

"I've already promised I would," Iris answered. She felt resigned.

"I mean now."

"You mean . . . this week."

"I mean—to-night."

"Athelstan, you're not trying to infuse romance into a business proposition by a Connecticut marriage."

"Iris, I've told you repeatedly I'm mad about you. I can't go on without you. I don't want to wait for a beastly ceremony. I want you." His eyes glistened as he reached forward to take her.

She held out her hand against him. "You've

decided if you're bound to be in the papers you may as well be in the tabloids. As Tony would say: 'Wealthy heiress elopes with English nobleman.' "

"Iris," he said, his voice unsteady, "I'm serious. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you. Let's get away from all the silly formalities by a quiet marriage to-night."

Iris thought of Craig again. She thought of all he had told her, of all she had read in his eyes. This would be a neat way of repaying him, of settling once and for all the wearying problems which beset her.

"Elopement . . ." she mused.

"It'd be beautiful," he said. "Speeding along on a moonlit road. . . ."

Iris thought of speeding away from the muddle, the bitterness from Craig's deceit.

". . . A little tranquil town, asleep, and all to ourselves. . . ."

Iris thought of simplicity, freedom from sham, freedom from her wrecked little romance.

". . . A hurried marriage and we'll be all to each other to go where we want. . . ."

Iris shut her eyes on his eager face, the twitching mouth. She thought of going where she wanted . . . of Craig . . . of what he would think.

"Let's go," she said.

When she emerged from the door into the rear court wearing a champagne colored sport suit,

and a small bag hastily packed by Marie, she found the duke waiting with her Packard roadster.

"Let me drive," she said. She could speed away best herself.

CHAPTER XIV

CRAIG was lonely in his quarters after his encounter with Iris. He had been unable to explain and he realized he made a sorry appearance. When she drove off, there was a desperation about her. She was like a wild thing poised for flight. Craig grew increasingly restless in his narrow quarters.

He decided to go downstairs and have a chat with Coombes. Coombes was the only one of the servants who liked him, who didn't resent what they called his "ritziness." He descended the steep, dark stairs which led directly into the garage.

As he turned the angle he was stopped in his tracks by a voice. It was a very agitated voice.

The Duke of Athelstan said: "Hurry there, Coombes. No, it's for Miss Wyndham. Damn you, man, don't stand there as if you doubt my word. The Packard roadster, do you hear?"

Craig tiptoed back upstairs. He hurried down the hall to the stairs which opened in the rear of the garage. There was some funny business here and here was his chance to discover it. He crept to the side of the garage, listening to the big car in reverse.

It stopped, the motor purring. Coombes was changing seats with the duke, probably. Craig ran along the side of the garage. He heard the car start forward. He spun around the corner. The roadster moved slowly out of the doors. Craig dashed low to the driveway. As the rear end of the car cleared the garage he leaped on the trunk attached to the rear.

As his hands grasped it, the car lurched forward under the nervous foot of the duke. Craig was swung half way off. He was hanging on by a precarious grip. The duke sped along the driveway at a speed harrowing to Craig, clinging wildly on, his grip threatening to break at every sharp turn.

The car climbed the incline to the courtyard. At the abrupt curve into the court the duke slid the car around, skidding badly. Craig's grip was torn loose. He was thrown across the driveway, striking heavily on the gravel and rolling over on the grass.

He was a bit dazed. He shook himself a couple of times to clear his head. He raised himself slowly. Nothing broken. He glanced down the archway and saw the roadster parked in front of the entrance. The motor was running, the door was open.

At that moment Iris hurried through the entrance. She wore a sport suit and carried a small bag. She made one long graceful stride into the

car, and slammed the door. Craig started forward.

"Iris!" he shouted.

The roar of the motor drowned his voice as she shot the car forward. He ran desperately for a few steps, then stopped. He turned and sprinted for the garage.

"Coombes," he panted. "Give me the Mercedes!"

"What's come over you, young fellow?"

"Quick, Coombes. It's urgent!"

Coombes stared aghast at his classy young friend, being suddenly excited, just like the rest of them.

"You promise to bring it back," he said hesitantly, starting for the car.

"What do his promises mean?" Patterson stepped into the room. He held a leveled revolver on Craig. "I told Fournoy we better divide the night into shifts and watch you."

"Get the car, Coombes," said Craig.

"Stay where you are," snapped Patterson, swinging the pistol to him.

In that second Craig leaped. Patterson swung the pistol back. Craig's fist crashed into his jaw and he went down like an ox.

"Do I get that car, Coombes?"

Coombes unlocked it and started the motor.

"I'll back it out," Craig said.

Coombes gasped as the long roadster shot backward into the garage, stopping an inch be-

fore Mr. Wyndham's Hispano. Craig started forward at a bound, twirling the wheel and shooting the car in a quick arc. He grazed the doors as he went out with no slackening of speed. There was a louder roar and the car leaped forward.

As he tore down the driveway, Craig glanced around in the car. On top of the seat he saw a crumpled gray hat and a pair of pigskin gloves. Tony's! This was the car he drove. The hat was a little too tight for him, but he pulled it down on one side after the fashion of Tony.

He pulled on the gloves. He slid the car to a stop directly in front of the gates.

"More work for you, Laddie boy," he cried in imitation of Tony's voice. It was the phrase he had heard Tony use.

He waved his gloved hand over the side and slumped down in the seat so that only the lower side of his face was visible and that shadowed by the rakish angle of the hat.

"You're a gay one, Mr. Tony," Ladd called, as he released the gates. "Running out at midnight."

The gates had swung wide and Craig didn't bother about replying.

He stepped on the accelerator and the car plunged through to the main road. With no hesitation he swung, bouncing and skidding, to the right. He had already figured out that they wouldn't take the left side which led toward the

mountains and deserted country. The right led toward Connecticut. He found the road. The engine roared. The car streaked into the night.

Iris held her foot down on the accelerator. The duke watched the needle quivering between sixty and seventy.

"Don't you think you'd better slow down?" he said.

"Didn't you want to speed down a moonlit road?"

They swung around a sharp curve and skidded dangerously.

"Speed," said the duke, "but not flying."

Iris eased her foot a little and the accelerator dropped below sixty. They could feel no decrease in speed.

"Can't we go at a more reasonable pace?" the duke protested. "If another car—"

"You wanted to speed," Iris said, "and I'm speeding." Her voice was a little wild. There was a strange glow in her eyes and a kind of reckless smile on her lips. The needle dropped to fifty. "If we go any slower," she said, "you might as well run along beside me where you'll be safe."

The duke lit a cigarette and watched the road. Iris liked the dark road with its many turns, overhanging with trees. It silenced her thoughts. It killed the inner voice.

They passed through a small town with not a light visible. Later they entered Carbury.

"This is in Connecticut," Iris announced.

"Where we can be married," the duke said with relief.

"The state, not the town. We're going to Greenwich, it's so romantic."

She rumbled through several streets until she found a garage open. "We may as well get gas," she said. "We might ride a long time."

The duke gave her an odd look. Iris grew restless while the tank was being filled. As she started forward, she saw a lunch wagon that was open.

"What I've always wanted," she said, "a lunch wagon sandwich. Athelstan, fetch me a . . . what's the name? . . . Oh, a western sandwich. Get one for yourself."

The duke was ready to protest. Something madly impetuous in her manner restrained him.

"You're gloriously audacious," he said.

He entered the lunch wagon. Shortly after he returned with two westerns.

"Silly sandwich," said the duke. "Silly name."

"Silly ride," said Iris. "Silly girl."

She drove the car forward, picking up the speed, eating her sandwich with one hand. As she hit the road, she finished her sandwich, and shot the car up to sixty.

The duke looked behind. "You know," he said, "there seemed to be a car following us

through Carbury. Now it's coming down this road."

Iris looked in the windshield mirror and could see the wavering light of a car reflected.

She turned a curve and increased the speed to sixty. A moment later she saw the light sparkle in her mirror, no dimmer. She pressed the accelerator to sixty-five. The light in the mirror remained a steady glow. Iris was puzzled.

No car should follow them through Carbury at one o'clock and take the same road at this terrifying speed. She suspected a chase. In her wanton mood, the idea excited her. She pressed the accelerator down to the floorboard. The needle climbed to seventy. It wavered above. Iris pressed hard with her foot. She had the last ounce of speed.

The roadster swung around a curve, skidded into the ditch on the far side. Iris jerked the wheel, pressing her foot down hard. It climbed back on the road and settled down.

"Ah, my God," groaned Athelstan, "there hasn't been an accident in our family since the reign of George the First."

"Cheer up," Iris said, "there might be one tonight."

The light flashed into the mirror again as the car swung around the curve.

The duke looked behind. "Jove, I think it's getting nearer."

Iris looked at the mirror. The light was get-

ting larger and steadier. She pressed hard. The light had grown from a flickering speck to a steady glow, nearly filling the mirror.

There was only one person in her life who popped up on such occasions. Craig! She had seen him drive a car the night he went to New York. From that, and from the way he did other things, he was the only person she knew who would drive a car as the one behind was being driven. Her needle pointed a little above seventy. He must be doing better than eighty to overtake her.

The light from behind covered the mirror and shot a glow across Iris.

"Who can the bounder be?" said the duke. He was nervous.

"Probably a speed cop." That was reasonable. But another sense warned her that it was Craig, the one man who had touched her at realities in herself. The one man who shared the crises of her life, forming the one genuine contact.

She hated him for this. She hated him for doing it and deceiving her. Her rage grew as the car behind swerved outward to draw alongside. She wouldn't allow it. Iris turned the car directly in the middle of the road. She took a curve on two wheels, skidding and bumping along the edge of the ditch.

She jerked the wheel and the car came back into the road.

"Good heavens!" shrieked Athelstan.

The other car had cut alongside on their right. The madman must have taken the curve on the inside and swerved around her. It drew slowly even. She looked across. It was Craig!

He waved her to stop. She edged closer to him. The duke groaned. Craig gave not an inch. The fenders scraped. Iris edged back toward her side. Craig turned his hood toward her. She stuck to the road. The fenders scraped again. Iris stuck grimly.

The faster car moved forward a foot and bore into hers again. The fenders scraped and the car lurched under Iris' hand. It was hard holding the heavy roadster to the road, pounding along at this speed. With this other car forcing against her front wheel, the slightest deviation meant a clash.

Ahead was a curve. Iris took her foot off the accelerator, and eased in the brake. She skidded to a long stop. The final swerve threw the two cars together, as Craig brought his to a quick stop.

Like a flash he was out of the car and beside her. She had never seen his face so determined. Iris flung her head up, flaming with rage and helplessness.

"By what right do you stop me in this fashion?"

"I thought you might get hurt," he said.

"Since when were you appointed guardian of my welfare?" Iris flared.

"I forget the exact date. It was around the time of the swimming festival."

His reference to that only served to increase her fury. The silent nervousness of Athelstan by her side made it worse. She was rapidly losing her self-control, a childish frustration possessed her.

"I think you are an insolent, obnoxious, meddling . . ."

"Bally meddling," said the duke.

"When it's your turn," Craig cut in, "I'll snap my fingers."

"The man is insane," cried Iris. "You leave me at once or I'll have you arrested as—as a public nuisance and . . . and . . ."

"A beastly highwayman," the duke supplied.

"I'll not go," said Craig, "and you'll not arrest me."

"What do you want? Why do you follow me about in this fashion? Don't you know I don't want you around me?"

"Stupid oaf," the duke said.

"I want to prevent you from a foolhardy act, which you will regret."

"I'm capable of deciding the wisdom of my actions. I am not interested in the opinions of our gardener."

"To-night I am not on the estate. I am a man. And you are a woman."

"Athelstan," she cried, "put this menial in his place."

"By jove, you're right," the duke stuttered. "You're a great bounder, you know, a perfect ass of a fellow. Will you go or shall I make you go?"

"You make me go."

"How utterly ridiculous. Iris, I cannot soil my hands with a menial. My family has not crossed swords with a commoner since the first earl of Beresford."

Iris was almost in tears. Athelstan was making her comic before this man. This . . .

"You . . . you," she exclaimed, "you boor!"

He smiled faintly. "The boor steps in where angels fear to tread," he said.

"Will you please leave me alone. I want to be alone."

"Yes, I will leave you alone in this car. His highness and I will drive back in the Mercedes."

"I'd rather walk back," said the duke, "than ride with that lout."

"Oh, you'll get used to me. I'm not a bad sort."

"He'll do nothing of the kind," Iris said. "I want Athelstan with me. Stand aside." She started the motor.

"Your highness, will you come with me, or shall I use persuasive methods?"

"If you lay your hands upon me," screamed the duke, "I'll have you horse-whipped and thrown in jail."

"Alas, I shall be horse-whipped." Craig re-

moved his foot from the running board and started around the front of the car. Iris released the clutch. The Packard lunged forward.

Craig made a wild leap. The fender struck the rear of his leg a glancing blow and spun him around, staggering. As the car shot by he threw himself at it, grasping the top of the door, with his knees on the running board.

Iris stifled a scream, then went dead white. The duke raised his fist and struck at Craig's face. Craig jerked his head aside and received only a glancing blow. He had gotten a firm grip on the door with his left hand and, with his knees pressed in tight against the bottom, Craig shot his right hand open across the duke's face. He wrapped his fingers around the jawbone line, and pulled himself to his feet by holding the grip. The duke fought futilely at the steel-like grasp.

Iris was trembling with conflicting emotions. The car careened madly around the curve. Craig swayed outward precariously, clinging with his left hand to the door and pulling the struggling duke over the top of the door. The car evened on the straight road. Craig shoved the duke back and climbed in over him. He wedged himself between the duke and Iris.

The struggling beside her made it almost impossible for Iris to control the car and she released the accelerator. Craig caught the wheel in one firm hand, shoved his foot across to the

brake and jammed down. The car jerked to a stop. He turned off the switch.

Iris turned on him like a tigress. "Now, you brute," she said scornfully, "what have you accomplished by this display of strength?"

She saw that struck him and she was glad.

He said: "I haven't finished yet."

"Now, I suppose, you'll demonstrate how you can lift the car with your shoulders."

"No, I'll demonstrate that I'm a better judge of your welfare than you are. Will you drive back alone, so that the duke and I can proceed together?"

"I will not."

"I'll get out," said Athelstan in a choked voice. He was rubbing his face.

"You'll sit where you are," Iris cried. "And you—"

"Miss Wyndham, either the duke goes back with me in the Mercedes, or he goes back alone in this car—and you go with me in the Mercedes."

"Will you please go away?" Iris half sobbed.

"Only with the duke—or you." He was firm and gentle.

"Please leave me." Iris felt hysterical with humiliation and rage and strange unruly emotions that welled in her.

"If you refuse to make a choice, I'll have to. You shall go with me; I'll feel surer of your safety. The duke can take care of himself."

"If you touch me my father will kill you!"

"A horse-whipping awaits me, it may as well be a thorough job. Will you come, or shall I use persuasion?"

"If you lay your hands on me I'll kill you myself," Iris flamed.

"Miss Wyndham, I'll gladly die to get you safely home. You cannot be trusted in this mood."

"Please go." Iris covered her face. The sobs were breaking through her control.

She felt his arms go about her waist and under her knees. They were soft and easy. He started to lift her. Generations of pride rebelled in this subjection and Iris fought like a little savage. The arms remained gentle, but in them she felt the steel that made her helpless.

He carried her down the road, walking with long easy strides, and carrying her as though she were a child.

She perceived the ridiculousness of this struggle and she ceased, stiffening herself against him. She saw the Mercedes standing under a sheen of moonlight.

She thought . . . escape on a moonlit road. It was all too horrible. Capture by this dominant man who stole her bracelet, deceived her, was allied with another woman.

Iris caught a glimpse of his face, determined, but kind . . . and solicitous. His profile, etched against the night, she noticed its classical features, the noble mold of his head. Who was

this man—this man of her destiny? Could he have deceived her as grossly as she imagined?

He placed her in the seat of the Mercedes. She sat, stiff and defiant. He turned the car deftly. "Home, Craig," he said.

They were going back to the Manor.

CHAPTER XV

THE silence between them was oppressive. Craig's jaw was set in a grim, straight line. Iris stole a glance at him. She burst out, "You have humiliated me before my fiancé, Craig. You had no right to do this."

"I took the right," he said curtly, "I had to."

"This time," she said, "you stepped over the line. I think I hate you for it."

"I *had* to," he said. "What else could I do, Iris? I saw you running blindly into disaster. You had to be stopped. There was no one else to do it."

"You're taking a lot for granted. Perhaps I wanted to go."

"You know that isn't true."

"You . . . you deceived me, Craig. How can I believe that your motives are all that you claim them to be? First you tell me that you did not steal the bracelet. I find a note . . . *after* I've believed in you and trusted you, mind . . . written to some unknown person asking her if she has received it. How could you write asking her if she had received it when you had no knowledge of it?"

"I can only tell you," he said slowly, "that I

did not steal the bracelet. I did write the note. It had nothing to do with the theft. My word of honor on that, Iris."

"I . . . can't understand," she said pitifully. "Craig . . . how can you expect me to understand when you leave me in the dark this way?"

"I am in the dark, too," he said tersely, "that is all I can say, Iris."

Suddenly Iris felt great burning tears welling up in her eyes. She was furious with herself for this weakness. She didn't know why she was crying. She tried to get control of herself. Then all her pent-up emotions were released. The flood gates of the woman gave way and a burst of weeping threatened to stifle her.

Craig drew the car to the side of the road in an easy stop. Iris buried her face in her hands. She felt his face loom above her, his hands softly on her own.

"Iris," he murmured. "Iris . . . don't . . . you make me feel a beast."

His sympathy warmed her. Where was her pride that she found an odd pleasure in having him think he caused her pain? He placed his arm about her and drew her to him. A shudder passed through her. The sanctuary she felt in him frightened her.

"Iris," he pleaded. "Please . . . I was a cad."

"It isn't that," she said, her sobs ceasing. "It's . . . everything."

"The inner voice," he suggested.

"The inner voice." She tried to reach for her handkerchief without moving from her restful position. Instantly he pressed his own into her hand. It was a delicate silk and she noticed dimly it was colored with a modernistic design. When she pressed it to her face she caught a fine masculine scent.

It aroused a glimmer of the turbulent moment in the woods. In that glimmering she felt that she was being lifted out of herself. "I'm being very silly," she said, trying to control the fear-some emotion stirring within her.

"You're being adorable," he said.

She raised her face to look at him. The weeping had softened her face into a yielding beauty. She saw his eyes glow and his face change into the expression which so powerfully affected her.

"I'm sorry I was . . . so . . . horrible to you," she said.

His arm tightened. "You could never be horrible to me. If you had me shot at dawn to gratify a whim, I should die happy having given you that moment of pleasure."

"Craig. . . ." It was a dutiful protest.

"You know, I told you there was always one slave whose worship for the princess inspired the others, made them content. They toiled, their backs gleaming in the sun, their bodies aching, to haul in great loads, so that she may have the odor of frankincense and myrrh."

She nodded. She had loved his saying that.

"I am that slave," he said humbly. "All I should ask is to be near you, to feel your exquisite presence. It is I who have been uplifted by you, it is I to whom you have brought the dreams of an unworldly beauty."

"Craig," she murmured, "you make it impossible for me to answer."

"You don't need to. You have expressed yourself by being alive. You are the dream, I the dreamer. You know, dreams of fair women . . . they haunt the dreams of all men. You've always haunted mine. Always my dreams took form in you. When I saw you as Iris Wyndham . . . you were the woman who had lived in my dreams. I felt as though I had reached the end of a long journey."

"A long journey," she mused. "When will I reach the end of mine?"

"When you answer that inner voice which bids you escape from all the artificialities which bind you. Then you will find the real woman within. The woman of that supernal beauty which is embodied in your form. No one could be so beautiful unless it came from within."

"Craig, there is something within. I don't dare think it is me."

"You mean you don't dare live on the broad highway, follow the gypsy road of freedom. You don't dare be yourself."

"Yes . . . I'm afraid."

"For a girl as glorious as you to be untrue to

herself would be a tragedy. Iris, you're not a tragedy: you are divine. You're above the petty laws that govern earthbound humans. You are a goddess. You make your own laws."

"If only I thought so." His words, soft music to her, caused her doubts of him to be silenced. She was lifted higher and higher above herself.

"You've made the laws of my life," he said fervently. "You've changed it from an ordinary humdrum thing into a life that is worth living. Could less than a goddess do that to one who has only seen her from a distance?"

She recalled their conversation on that evening he had left for New York. He had said she was always far away, then he said they were speaking of physical distance.

"You spoke of distance once before," she said. "You remember? . . ."

"I remember every word we've exchanged. I count them like a rosary."

"Did you mean physical distance or distance of—circumstance?"

"Then and now, I mean both."

"To-night," she said softly, "there is no distance."

"No, Iris, for to-night . . . at least . . . we're an escaped princess and an adventurous slave."

"That to-night, at least . . . it frightens me."

"You don't want to go back?" he said tensely.

"I never want to go back!" She spoke with a fervor which shook her whole being.

"Let's escape into the land of dreams, where the slave enamored meets his princess."

She turned her lovely face toward him. "Enamored . . ." she murmured.

"Iris," he breathed, "I love you. Since the first day, in your drawing room, I've adored you."

"Craig . . . Craig . . ." Iris trembled with the tumultuous emotion which swept her to him. Her life had been sheltered, her decisions made for her. She was helpless in this madness which destroyed all convention, destroyed everything in its sweep. She turned to him in her helplessness, he who caused it, and clung fiercely.

"I would not allow myself to admit that love, Iris," he murmured, his voice shaken. "I felt that we were made for each other. You had been mine in dreams. You should be mine. A slave may worship his princess, but to love her . . . I have dared. I've always known I had to tell you, I love you."

Iris trembled with the passion which welled up in her, made her want him to hold her close, smother her with kisses.

"Oh, Craig," she murmured, with surrender in her voice, "I need your love."

His arms crushed her to him, and her slender arms encircled his neck to cling. His lips slowly closed on her mouth. She felt drawn into him as

his kiss shot waves of delicious weakness through her body.

Iris had never imagined a surrender would be so complete, so marvelous. Iris, the proud, the independent . . . she yielded her lips, herself, with an ecstasy that seemed too intense for her to endure.

"Craig," she whispered tremulously, "say again you love me."

"Iris . . ." his voice shook, his fierce grasp seemed to melt her into him. "I love you. I worship you. You are mine."

"Yours," she breathed, offering her lips for his kiss which made them one.

She couldn't bear him to stop, ever. It was too wonderful, too beautiful.

When he raised his mouth, she saw a struggle taking place within him. He wanted to ask her for marriage.

"Iris . . ."

He couldn't ask her. He was afraid of the social barrier. He was afraid of that part of his life she didn't know. He was afraid, perhaps, of the girl in the South.

"Craig, do you love me more than any one?"

"I love you more than I ever loved any one . . . more than I dreamed it possible to love."

She saw his love in his eyes. He yearned toward her with a passionate longing which could only be answered with her lips. She clung to him, afraid for the moment to end.

"Iris," he said shakily, "that you could love me, seeing me as I am. . . . It is too wonderful. It was a dream, my dream of the ideal . . . the romance I never expected."

She saw him hesitate, unable to ask her what he longed to, what she yearned to hear.

"I love you. You, whatever you are . . . as you are, your marvelous self. I've always loved you."

"Oh, Iris. . . ." A shudder of pain passed over his face. "To be with you, always. . . . To have you for mine, alone. But to-morrow you'll awake . . . to-night will be moon madness."

"It is madness," she cried. "But I'm awake now. Before I was asleep."

"My adorable Iris. . . ." He could not speak what held his mind.

It did not matter, nothing mattered but that he hold her close to him. Let her inhale the masculine odor of him, give her the delirious pleasure of his kiss. That was important. A thousand things held them apart.

She could not think of that now. . . .

"Oh, Craig!" His last kiss was so beautiful, so overwhelming, she could not endure it. The terror of being apart . . . alone . . . when she loved him with her whole being . . . when he gave himself to her.

"Iris, this is torture . . . to love you so . . . and be kept apart. Iris!"

It was a cry, a cry to her. A cry from the

darkness in which she herself floundered. She saw only him . . . their love . . . all else was baffling, a fog of darkness. Her own eyes were a stricken silent cry to him.

"My sweet," she murmured. He must forget the horrors that stood between them. He must forget everything but that they belonged to each other, that to-night . . . they were one.

"Darling . . ." he tried to speak.

It was torture. She could not bear the thought. She clung closer, offered her lips to seek oblivion from the tormenting thoughts that they were kissing across an impassable barrier.

CHAPTER XVI

CRAIG was finding it difficult to hide his nervousness from his constant guards. They had been very agitated about his escape the previous night. He returned to find them ready to send frantic wires to police stations about the surrounding country. Keenan was debating a search for him.

He refused to answer any questions. It had been very hard. He debated the wisdom of leaving the estate temporarily, and wondering how he could make communications if he stayed. He had no chance to make decisions. Surrounded by Keenan and his four lusty henchmen, each anxious to pay off a debt to Craig, he could only go peaceably to his quarters.

There was much talk among them of arresting him. He was forced to admit his actions had looked suspicious. Only their fear of unpleasant publicity if he happened to be guilty had restrained them. They had taken the only alternative of making his life miserable.

Craig's work on the garden was hardly a pretense. His mind was churning with thoughts of Iris, the accumulating complications that were closing in on him. Last night had been an awak-

ening to him. Although he had been urged to Iris ever since he first saw her, he did not know that the realization of love would be so overwhelming. He was helplessly gripped in an emotion, which prevented clear thought.

He was hoping wildly all day that she would communicate with him. She was aware of his position, and if she wanted to see him, as he hoped she did, Craig was sure she would try.

He went directly to his quarters after work, to be ready in case she tried to reach him. He had barely finished cleaning himself from the day's work when there was a knock on his door. He sprang to open it.

A rather pretty girl stood there. After a moment, he recognized her as one of the maids in the Manor.

"Craig . . ." she said tentatively.

"Come in; won't you?"

"I haven't a minute. I only wanted to give you a message from Miss Wyndham. She needs to see you immediately. She asked me to tell you to come to the summer house . . . you know . . ." he nodded . . . "and she will be there waiting for you."

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you so much. Did she—ah—"

"That's the whole message. I must go."

"Thanks a lot."

He crossed the room swiftly and looked out of the window. Patterson was sitting on a box,

smoking a pipe, beside the entrance door. In the garage, Craig knew Flourney was talking to the chauffeurs.

He left his room quietly and tiptoed down to the end of the hall. The men's showers were empty. This faced on one of the sides of the building. He softly raised the frosted glass window, climbed over the sill, and lowered himself to the stone ledge above the first floor window.

Very cautiously, pressing against the wall, he bent his body until his hands reached the ledge on which he stood. Bending double, he grasped the ledge, and dragged his feet down the wall along the slight stone projection of the window. He knew he was invisible from where they sat, because the cars stood before this window.

When he reached his full length and was hanging, he was only a few feet from the ground. His drop made a dull thud, scarcely audible. He crawled along the grass, keeping the edge of the garage between himself and Patterson. When he reached the trees, he stood up, and advanced from tree to tree until he was in the light woods back of the lake.

In a short walk he emerged on the rocky knoll, on the top of which the summer house reposed. The sun had gone down and the summer dusk gave the remote spot an air of tranquillity. The house was merely a rough board floor, with posts supporting pagoda roof, and log railing connect-

ing the posts. Rustic benches were placed along the outside.

Craig was surprised to find no one there. He gave a brief look around. It was an ideal setting for love. The cliff took a sheer drop of twenty or thirty feet, on one side of the house, along the bottom of which ran the stream which supplied the lake. On all other sides were woods.

The dusk closed in rapidly and a slight breeze was blowing up. The desolation of the aloneness caused Craig to think it was an equally ideal setting for a crime. He heard a rustling in the woods and he spun around, startled.

The bushes parted and from the opening emerged . . . not Iris . . . but the Duke of Athelstan. He was immaculately clad in evening clothes, and upon his lapel wore one of the honorary ribbons of the House of Athelstan. His blond hair was meticulously parted and his mustache waxed to a high degree. He was all ready for a party. Although he wore no hat, white kid gloves covered his hands.

"A bit of a surprise, I dare say," he nervously greeted Craig, forcing a smile.

"Somewhat." Craig eyed him narrowly.

The duke stepped into the house. Craig was standing in the middle of the floor. Athelstan produced a platinum case from his pocket and offered a cigarette to Craig. Craig shook his head.

The duke took one, knocked its end carefully, and lit it.

"Do you mind if we sit down?" he said. "I'm rather winded from the walk. I hurried, you know."

He and Craig sat down on the rustic seat on the side facing the stream. Craig sat sideways, one arm along the railing, ostensibly looking at the rocky cliff, watching the duke from the corner of his eye.

Athelstan puffed on his cigarette a moment. He said: "You see, I took this rather—ah—unique manner of meeting you, because I fancied you wouldn't make a rendezvous with me and I couldn't afford to be seen coming to your quarters."

Craig nodded. "The maid was part of your scheme."

Athelstan tried to smile genially. "Yes. You see, the idea is that I'm in a bit of a hole. It seems that you have . . . what is the quaint term of you Americans . . . 'something on me.' I don't know exactly what it is; no doubt, nothing of importance. However, your high-handed actions show that your knowledge can cause you to be very inconvenient to me at this time." He stopped and looked closely at Craig's face. Craig appeared to be listening interestedly, while he looked into the water below.

"What I mean is, to have you keep your in-

formation to yourself for a few days would be worth quite a bit to me."

"No doubt," Craig said.

"To get to the point of the matter, how much would your silence be worth to you?"

"I don't know. I'm a loquacious fellow."

"Ha, ha," the duke forced a titter. "Jolly good. Ha, ha. Well, I'm prepared to pay a good price for your silence."

"It'll take a good price to silence my golden voice."

"Exactly," said the duke in a suddenly hard voice, "how much?"

"More than you have, I'm afraid."

"There is nothing too much for the Duke of Athelstan."

"Doubtless—for the Duke of Athelstan."

The duke started forward, restrained himself. His face paled. "It's futile to make insinuations," he said. "I've confessed you are in a position to make me decidedly uncomfortable. I am here to pay you to make no use of your position. In short, a business transaction, in which I buy your silence."

"My silence is not for sale."

The duke was losing his temper. "See here, fellow, I don't know precisely what you are, but you must be interested in money."

"Sorry to seem contrary, but I'm not."

"What does interest you?"

"Having you quietly leave the Manor, with any explanations you think plausible."

"You insolent pup. How dare you give me orders!"

"I don't know. I'm funny that way."

The duke glared at the averted face. "See here," he exclaimed angrily, "I can stand any attack you care to make. My position is unassailable. You could make it uncomfortable for me, that's all. If you persist in being loutish, we won't discuss it any further." The duke arose. "You haven't anything *really* on me."

"No?" Craig turned from the contemplation of the stream to look at Athelstan. In the shadows of the deepening dusk, his face was barely discernible.

"What is it?" The duke tugged viciously at his mustache.

"You'd better watch out," Craig said, "you might pull that off."

"Stupid ass," snarled the duke. "What have you got?"

Craig leisurely drew several letters from his coat pocket. From among them he took a short note. He arose and held it before the duke's eyes.

"Ever see that before?"

The duke read his own handwriting: "On a matter of urgent importance, will you be good enough to meet me at six-thirty in the small library of the Manor? It is wise this remain

strictly between us. Yours truly, Dean Cameron, Duke of Athelstan."

He snatched at it. Craig caught his hand and gently pushed it back.

"You had this all the time," the duke gasped.

"I had it with me in the library when Miss Wyndham asked for it."

"Why didn't you produce it then?"

"I was interested in your game. I enjoyed watching it."

The duke looked steadily at Craig. He said suddenly: "I'll give you five thousand dollars for that letter."

"Cash?" Craig smiled, his teeth gleaming in the semi-darkness.

The duke bit his lip.

"Do you question the check of the Duke of Athelstan?" he blustered.

"No." Craig looked at him steadily.

"Damn you, man, what is it you want?"

"I've already told you: quietly leave."

"I refuse to be intimidated by a servant."

"Then you'll have to be prepared for the consequences."

"And what could be the consequences from a gardener's word?" the duke sneered.

"I haven't decided yet."

"You don't know yet, eh?" In Athelstan's jeer there was a question, a hope.

"I know. I can't predict the consequences until I see what you do next."

"I can't bother to waste my time any longer with your nonsense."

"By all means, don't let me detain you."

Athelstan remained standing. He looked narrowly at Craig. The easy confidence of the man worried him. His self-control suddenly broke.

"You dirty swine, you can't behave like this to me."

"I'm doing it."

"Well, you're going to stop or—or—"

"What'll you do?" Craig half smiled.

Athelstan's face worked unpleasantly. His whole body trembled.

"I'll show you," he screamed.

Craig should have been warned, but he wasn't. The cowardice Athelstan had shown repeatedly did not prepare him for any physical display.

The duke sprang toward him like a maniac. His open hands struck Craig's chest and he threw his whole weight behind it. Taken off guard, Craig staggered backward. He jerked up his hands to grip the duke's arms.

The bench struck him under his knees and he toppled backward, missing his clutch at Athelstan, his arms flung into the air. The railing struck his toppling body below his hips.

The duke gave a violent push. Craig lost his balance. His head shot backward and outward. His feet left the floor. He hung suspended like a seesaw, grasping frantically for the railing. The duke shoved his feet.

Craig toppled backward off the porch. His shoulders struck the rocks midway down the cliff. He turned a backward somersault and slid down the rocks.

Athelstan rushed to the railing and looked over. In the gathering darkness he saw the body bump its last rock and slide into the water of the stream. Not a movement came from the body. Lifeless, or at least unconscious, it dropped into the water like a stone.

The duke strained his eyes to watch for its reappearance. After a second or two a few bubbles came up. Then the water was still. The darkness was now almost impenetrable, but the duke could see clearly the level sheen of the water. He watched and saw not a ripple disturb it.

He turned away quickly. He saw the white blur of the letter Craig had dropped on the floor. He stooped quickly and picked it up. He lit a match and looked around for his cigarette stub. He found that and stuffed it in his pocket. There was no evidence he had been here. The maid did not know he arranged the meeting.

He had phoned her in her quarters, disguised his voice as Tony, and told her Iris was already on her way. It had been easy to use Tony's slang and breezy manner. The maid had suspected nothing.

He looked at his watch. Just seven o'clock. He had been away since six-thirty. He plunged

down the rocky knoll and hurried toward the Manor. He crept in the side court entrance, up the rear stairs of his wing of the castle, and to his room.

No one had seen him leave or return. He washed his hands, combed his hair, and at seven-twenty appeared casually in the drawing room for the seven-thirty dinner. At six he had left the Wyndhams after a long tennis match.

Iris was restlessly moving about the room, chatting with one group a while, then with another. Athelstan performed the expected courtesies. He took a position in the line of Iris.

She left her group and started across the room. The duke intercepted her.

"Iris," he said casually, "I didn't have an opportunity to talk with you. After that ghastly episode last evening I should rather think you'd want to talk to me."

"I don't see there is anything to say." Iris was visibly changed, in spite of her usual surface poise. Her eyes had the burning light of people who are experiencing something new. Her manner was surcharged with a restless excitement.

"Well," said Athelstan, "I should think you must have some reaction to our interrupted marriage."

"I do, but nothing for publication."

"Iris . . . do you realize we are engaged . . .

we were grossly interrupted in our attempt to marry . . . you must feel something."

"Relief," said Iris, with vehemence unusual in her.

"Relief, eh?" Athelstan frowned, studying her carefully. "I strongly suspect there was more between you and this gardener than you let me know."

"Was?" Iris said.

"Was," the duke replied with a sort of malicious firmness.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing in particular . . . except . . . I don't think he'd have the nerve to face the consequences of last night."

Iris felt from his manner that he knew more than he said. But how silly to allow this fop to penetrate her armor.

"How interesting," she said. "Now we might have more peace. I think we are going in to dinner, now."

CHAPTER XVII

THE papers were sent up with Iris' breakfast tray. They also accompanied the duke's breakfast tray. Anthony Wyndham had his at breakfast, and Mrs. Wyndham took it from him when he handed it to her silently. "That's what comes of it," he said.

"This will force Iris into action," Mrs. Wyndham said with a satisfied smile.

The headlines of the *Chronicle* were WYNDHAM HEIRESS PRESENTED WITH ATHELSTAN BRIDE BRACELET. It was given a column on the front page and a picture spread in the second section. The pictures were of Iris in riding clothes, in street clothes, in a costume which she had worn to a charity ball.

The story of Athelstan's forebears and the Athelstan bracelet was there in all its glory. Nothing was said of the theft. Jimmy Diggs had gotten in a lot of good work, had been patted on the back by the city editor, and was out drinking rum punchinos and regaling a fellow leg man with the details of his adventure.

"Anthony," Mrs. Wyndham said, leaning forward, "this is the best possible thing that could have happened."

"I dislike publicity in connection with Iris," Wyndham said. "It is never the best thing that could happen."

"But don't you see where it is advantageous? Iris will have to set a definite date for the wedding. It has been announced publicly. There will be news stories from now until the marriage. They will never tire of hashing it over."

Anthony Wyndham slammed the *Chronicle* on the table beside his plate. "I will not stand for it. It must be gotten over immediately."

"It is so picturesque," Mrs. Wyndham sighed. "Sometimes I wish that our marriage had been a trifle . . . well . . . sensational."

"Our daughter's will not be sensational," Anthony Wyndham said determinedly.

"You must press her to set a date."

"I will set a date for her."

Tony came in and eyed his orange juice with the expression of a man who would like to trick it and leave it unconsumed for once. He reached for his glass and looked over the rim of it at his father. "You look as though the plants had burned down in the middle of the night and your insurance had run out the day before," he said.

Mrs. Wyndham threw Anthony a warning glance. Tony was too staunch a supporter of Iris for it to be discussed before him. Anthony reached for the paper. Mrs. Wyndham snatched it and said hastily, "You read the *Times*, Tony

. . . there's an article in the *Chronicle* I want to read."

"Read it, then, and let me have it," Tony said. "Coggs is the only sports writer in New York that I care to read."

"I'll give you the sports section," she said with such amiability that Tony regarded her with a suspicious eye.

"What's in the paper you don't want me to see?"

"How ridiculous. There's nothing I don't want you to see."

"Then suppose you give me the *Chronicle* for one minute, no longer, and after that I'll give it back to you minus the sports section."

"Don't be ridiculous, Tony."

"Now I know there's something you don't want me to see," he grinned. "I know I haven't crashed the front page myself, or the roars would be echoing in my bedroom. Tell me, mater. No cereal, Bowles. My God, *no* sausage. Mother, order some eggs for me. You know I loathe sausage."

"Two three-minute eggs for my son, Bowles," Mrs. Wyndham said. "What are you going to do to-day, Tony?"

"Why this sudden interest in my activities? Changing the subject?"

"No. I wondered."

"I'm highly complimented. I'm going to sit in a chair and stare into space."

Iris entered the breakfast room. She had thrown a negligée over her pajamas and bore the paper in her hand. Her face was like a thundercloud. "Ah," Tony said. "My exquisite sister enters in a state of perturbation. She seems excited. She is about to speak."

Iris threw the paper on the table before her father. "Deny this," she said, and turned to leave the room. Tony dove for the paper and read the headlines. He looked at his mother.

"Welching on your little Tony," he said; "what's your game?"

Mrs. Wyndham paid no attention to him. Her gaze was riveted on Iris in fascinated horror. "Deny it?" she asked shrilly. "Deny what?"

"The engagement," Iris said.

"Iris!"

"I said deny it," Iris said, "and that's all I'm going to say, mother. You may screech your head off."

"Iris," Anthony Wyndham said, speaking for the first time, "you will dress and join us in the library."

"On one condition," Iris said.

"What is that?"

"That if there's to be a conference, Athelstan is excluded. I've something to say to all of you."

"To me, too?" Tony said.

"As you like. If you care to hear it."

"Try and keep me out. I'm going to be chairman."

"How long will you be, Iris?"

"Twenty minutes. Finish your breakfast and wait for me in the library."

When she went out, Mrs. Wyndham wailed, "I can see she's going to be difficult. I can *see* it!"

"Oh, isn't she!" Tony said, with a gleam in his eye, "and if she isn't, her little brother Tony will choke her."

They waited impatiently for Iris while Tony stared out of the library window and whistled a popular tune. She came presently, dressed in a white traveling suit and wearing a white felt hat. "Well," she said, "start, mother."

"Iris, why do you take this antagonistic attitude at the start?"

"We might as well set the tone of the interview," Iris said.

Anthony Wyndham said, "Sit down, Iris."

She sat down. Tony came over and sat beside her.

"You will set the date for your marriage now, so that your mother can go ahead with the arrangements. This newspaper story eliminates any possibility of delay. I will not have your name dragged before the public eye. Will you set a date?"

"No, father."

"Then I will. You will be married a month from to-day."

"I will not," Iris said. "I have decided that I will not marry Athelstan."

"Bravo!" Tony said.

Anthony Wyndham came and stood over her. "Your engagement has been announced," he said. "There has been no public breaking of an engagement and the explanations that go with it in the Wyndham family since I can remember. There will be none now."

"The announcement of the engagement was your doing, not mine."

"That makes no difference. It has been announced."

"It makes a great deal of difference from my standpoint," Iris said.

"What will Athelstan say?" Mrs. Wyndham wailed.

"He will say, 'By Jove, there's not been a scandal in the family since the reign of Charles the Second,'" Tony said.

"How do you plan to explain this?" Mr. Wyndham asked.

"I do not plan to explain it."

"But there must be explanations."

"Why?"

"Iris, you are being childish."

"For the first time in my life, I am not being childish."

"My dear girl. . . ." Mr. Wyndham sat down

beside her. "I am sorry to force you into something which is distasteful to you, but it is absolutely necessary for your own good that you go through with this."

Mrs. Wyndham was quietly crying in the corner. Iris said, "Mother . . . please." She turned to her father.

"Father," she said, "I am twenty years old. For twenty years, I have been a Wyndham. For twenty years, I have listened and obeyed. The traditions of the Wyndhams were a part of me. I was born of a proud strain. I have been proud when I did not feel proud. I have acted inhumanly when I felt human. I have considered a marriage which is hateful to me because I was a Wyndham. My life has not been mine, it has belonged to the proud traditions of the Wyndhams. I cannot go on. I must turn back before it is too late. Try to understand, father."

"Jane Wyndham," Mrs. Wyndham moaned. "Jane Wyndham. You look like her, you are as mad and reckless as she was . . . you will die as she did. . . ."

"Starving to death with pneumonia," Tony said.

"Mother . . . *please* . . ." Iris said.

Her father said, "Iris, you have ideas. You are being imbued with false values. The stories of the modern girl and her independence are figments of fiction writers' imaginations. It is a sorry existence at best. You stand for every-

thing young and beautiful. You will carry the name of Wyndham when your mother and I are gone. You and Tony. Our hopes and dreams are centered in you two."

"Sacrificing ourselves to the name of Wyndham," Iris said. "Father, you can't mean that. Has the name any meaning? Should it have any meaning except that of truth and courage? The most obscure line in America might be more worth while than the Wyndhams because they have followed a course of truthfulness and courage.

"I have believed all the things you just said, because I was brought up to believe them. They were made a part of my religion. The great name of Wyndham stands for so and so. But exactly *what* does it stand for? Its women were beautiful. They made good marriages. They were able to entertain society's best in the manner that society's best was accustomed to being entertained.

"They may have hated society's best. They were lying by inviting them to their homes. They may have hated their husbands. They were not courageous or they would not have married them. You know too well the record of the masculine Wyndhams, father. I needn't go into that. If they had been servants, the grand old name of Wyndham would have been in the police records, and you know it."

"Iris!"

"Sacrilege," she said, "treason."

"This is all beside the point."

"Very much beside it," she said, "surrounding it, in fact."

"I think we will end the discussion by saying that your wedding day will be a month from to-day. It is my wish. You may go."

Tony looked at Iris. She had gone white. She stood up, a proud little figure outlined against an oak-paneled background, fighting for more than her life. Her head was flung up. Her mouth quivered. Tony wanted to close his eyes. It was horrible to see Iris, his guarded Iris, being torn apart. He watched her, fascinated. On her next words her whole future hung. He almost prayed.

"I am not going to marry the Duke of Athelstan," Iris said. Her voice was still and cold. It was determined. It was the inner voice speaking through Iris' lips. She was not going to marry the Duke of Athelstan and she said so, simply. It was not a frantic rebellion. It was a cold statement.

"You are," Anthony Wyndham said.

"I will not. I cannot. I hate and loathe him. I would throw myself overboard on the way to England."

"You will come to your senses in an hour. You cannot throw this engagement away as unimportant. When you have had time to think of it, you will realize that I am right in insisting

upon an early wedding. I do not wish to talk of it any more."

"You do not wish to talk of it any more!" Iris cried. "You wreck my life in one sentence and then you do not wish to talk of it any more. Well, you will. You will, do you hear? My bags are packed upstairs. I am leaving to-day. I will never come back unless you let me go as I want to go . . . a part of the family, but not the Wyndham . . . *goat*. I am leaving, father, do you want to say good-by?"

"You will not leave this house! You are acting like a fifth-rate actress . . . you are dramatizing your emotions . . . making cheap melodrama of them. You would do credit to . . . to a shop girl!"

Mrs. Wyndham moaned and put her hands over her eyes. Iris said, "Mother . . . please, *please!*"

"Iris . . ." Tony said.

"Don't worry, boy," she said.

Tony sank back into his rôle of silent spectator. Her father snapped, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going out and be a shop girl among shop girls," Iris said, "and *love* it."

"How do you propose to make your living?"

"I will know when I reach that point," Iris said. "My plans are not formulated."

"You are packed?"

"I have ordered the car. It is waiting outside."

Wyndham went to the door and rang for Bowles. When he came, Wyndham said, "Tell Coombes Miss Iris will not need the car."

"Father! What are you doing? Bowles . . . tell Coombes I am coming."

"Tell Coombes Miss Iris will not need the car." Bowles bowed and left the room. Anthony Wyndham stared at his daughter. "You surely were not under the impression that I would allow you to go?"

"I can always order another car."

"You are going to your room. You will be confined in your apartment until you come to your senses. Your telephone connection will be cut off."

"You can't do this, father!" Tony sprang to his feet.

"Sit down, young man. I am better able to handle this situation than you and Iris together."

Tony came over and stood by Iris, his jaw set grimly.

Anthony Wyndham started toward them. He stopped within a few paces. "Are you going to your room, Iris, or must there be a scene?"

"There will be a jolly scene, I promise you," Tony said, "if you touch her."

"Stand aside, Anthony."

"I will not. Iris is unhappy. If she wants to leave this rotten mess behind, you'll stop her over my dead body."

"Tony, dear," Iris said, "please don't. You've no quarrel with father. This is mine."

"Leave the room, Anthony."

"I will not. If you touch her, I'll . . . I'll . . ."

"Leave the house!" Anthony Wyndham roared.

"I will, but not until Iris leaves with me."

"You young pup!" Wyndham started toward him with upraised arm.

Tony stood immovable. He would not and could not strike his father. His father might strike him, but he would not lift a hand.

Anthony senior paused, trembling with anger. "I don't want to hit you," he said. "You're past that age, Tony. *Leave the room.*"

"No, sir."

"You understand what this means?"

"Yes, sir."

"It means that you are severing all connections with Wyndham Manor. You will pack your bags and leave to-day."

"I will. Iris leaves with me."

Iris cried, "Tony. . . . *Father.* . . ."

"You will keep out of this," Anthony senior said.

"Tony," she cried, turning to him, "please leave the room and wait for father in your room. Let me talk to him alone."

"No."

He strode to the door and threw it open. "Go

away, Iris," he said. "Go away and . . . and be happy."

Anthony senior took one step toward him. Iris flung herself in front of Tony. "I will go," she said. "I will go upstairs, father. Promise me that Tony will not suffer for this. Promise me, or I won't go."

"If you obey me," Anthony senior said, "Tony will not answer for your disobedience."

"You promise?"

"I have promised."

Iris kissed Tony swiftly and held him close. "Thank you, Tony," she said. "I do thank you. . . ."

Tony said huskily, "Poor little kid. Why didn't you go through?"

"I couldn't," she said. "You're the only thing at Wyndham Manor that means anything to me. How could I?"

A faint mean from Mrs. Wyndham testified to the fact that there would soon be a first rate case of hysterics in the room. Iris shuddered and ran upstairs. Tony stood staring after her. Anthony senior pushed past him and went toward Iris' room. He locked the door after her and put the key in his pocket. He came downstairs and sent Bowles in search of Athelstan. He looked at his wife. "If you cannot control yourself," he said, "you had better leave this to me."

"Why must she be so *difficult*?" Mrs. Wyndham wailed.

"Because she is my dauhter," Anthony senior said, strangely enough.

"What are you going to tell him?"

"I will set the date of the wedding for a month from to-day. Can you make arrangements?"

"Of course." The hysterics were checked midway.

Iris paced the rooms of her apartment. If only Craig would come to her! She needed his strength, needed something to give her courage to go on. Her world was hemming her in. She would go on . . . be hemmed in and forget that there ever had been an inner voice. It was impossible. She sat down at her desk and scribbled him a note. All she said was, "My dear . . . tell me that last night was true. Iris."

She gave the note to Marie. "Ring for Bowles," she said, "and tell him that you have an errand to do. Take this to Craig, the assistant gardener, and wait for an answer."

Marie rang for Bowles and told him that she had an errand to do. Bowles' only instructions were to see that Miss Iris did not leave her apartment. He was in doubt as to whether he should include Marie in those orders. He said so. Marie drew herself up and snapped at him, "I have an errand to do, you fool . . . it is a personal errand. It has nothing to do with you or your orders. You can see for yourself that mademoiselle is in her apartment."

"You must come for me when you return," Bowles said. "I will let you in."

Marie flounced out and he locked the door behind her. Iris sat down to wait for her return. There was a knock at the door. She went over to it and called, "Who is it?"

"It is I . . . Tony."

She pressed her mouth against the door. "Thank you, Tony," she said, "thank you over and over again."

"Iris . . . what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to wait," she said. "What else can I do?"

"I'll brain Bowles with a chair and get the key if you say so."

"No, something's bound to happen."

"He's telling Athelstan now that you're to be married on the fifteenth of next month."

"How is Athelstan taking it?"

"With tuggings of the mustache and subdued cheers."

"Is mother still weeping?"

"She's making out a list for invitations."

"Tony . . . you'll have to stand by. If it comes to the worst, you'll have to help me."

"Count on me, baby. Wyndham Manor will be a house divided against itself."

"Oh, Tony . . . you're such a darling!"

"Who wouldn't be a darling for you, old girl?"

"Lots of them. Come back again, will you? Come back and talk to me."

"I'll bring my lunch and sit on this side if you want me to."

"No . . . just pop around once in a while and tell me the news of the outside world."

"I'll keep you posted on the progress of your wedding arrangements," Tony said.

"Don't joke about that. I can stand joking about anything else, but not that."

"Sorry, old girl. I'll come back. Bowles approaches with his heavy tread. 'Bye."

"'Bye," she said softly.

A moment later the key bit the lock and Bowles swung the door open to admit Marie. Marie still held the note crumpled in her hand. She turned a haughty glare upon the curious Bowles and waited until the door had swung shut once more. Iris could scarcely hide her anxiety. She clutched the maid's arm. Marie handed her the note. "He's not there," she said.

"Not there! Where is he?"

"I don't know, they just said he wasn't there."

"Did they say how long he had been absent?"

"Since last night, Ruggles said. He's very angry. He said Craig would lose his job when he came back."

"But surely he told you *something*!"

"Only that Craig wasn't there, mademoiselle."

Iris tore the note in bits and dropped it in the waste basket. "My dear . . . tell me that last night was true." Her dear . . . her Craig . . . the man she had surrendered her proud lips to

. . . was gone. He had gone to Judith Spottswood. Had kissed her, Iris Wyndham, and had gone to Judith Spottswood. She blinked her eyes rapidly. The hot tears stung her eyelids. She must not cry. She *must* not. She sent Marie into the other room for something. Marie must not see her tears.

She took a book from the table and sat down in a chair beside the window. She could not see the page. Everything blurred before her eyes. Was it possible that she was crying like a school-girl because a man had kissed and run away? She reached blindly for her handkerchief and wiped the tears from her cheeks as they dripped down from her eyes.

Where was he now? On his way to Judith Spottswood. How simple of her to believe that he had ever been on his way away from her! It had been a glamorous and romantic experience to him, over when the morning light drove the moon away. The inner voice! She wanted to laugh, but she could not. Follow the inner voice. She rose and flung the book in a corner. Through her tears, she saw the leaves crumple under the covers. It was a priceless first edition. *She* was a priceless first edition, and she was lying in a corner, crumpled. Because of a man who dug the earth around her father's rose-bushes, she wanted to die. It was impossible.

She threw herself on the divan and gave way to tears. Marie came in quietly, saw her, and

went out quietly. Iris knew that Marie had seen. She did not care. Nothing mattered now.

It was tea time when she finally rose from the davenport and bathed. She would have dinner alone, but she would dress for it. Her hands were trembling. There was an inner shudder shaking her perpetually. She could not escape it.

Marie was laying out her dinner frock. Iris wore a yellow tea-gown. She went to the window and stared across the courtyard. As she stared, her hand went to her throat and she cried, "Craig . . . Craig. . . ."

Craig was staggering across the courtyard between Patterson and Flournoy, the two detectives, beaten and bloody. He was weak. He could scarcely drag one foot behind the other. A jagged cut ran from his hairline to his left eyebrow.

He cast one desperate glance at her window. When he saw her, his eyes lighted up and he smiled. Iris threw the window open and held out her arms. He smiled again. She called him frantically when he disappeared, with the two men, into the door that led to the main rooms of the Manor.

She ran to the door and jerked at the knob. She was like a caged thing. He was hurt, and she could not go to him. She was nearer madness than she had ever been in her life. She beat her small white fists against the door crying, "Craig . . . Craig . . . my dearest. . . ."

Rage possessed her at the thought of her impotence. She shrieked at her father. "Let me out of here, do you hear? Let me out! *Let me out!*" But no one answered.

Her fists were being bruised against the hard oaken panels of the door. She picked up a chair and nearly wrenched her arms from their sockets by swinging it against the door. It made a sickening, weak thud. Iris shuddered up against the door and put her hands out flat against it. She whimpered, "Craig . . . Craig . . . they won't let me come to you!"

All the barriers were down.

CHAPTER XVIII

IRIS turned away from the door. She looked frantically around the room. She had to get to Craig. In her bedroom there was no means of escape. She went into her dressing room. Its only entrances were the doors into her bedroom and living room. She ran into her living room.

One experiment with the door to the hall convinced her of the futility of trying that. She advanced to the window. The high floors of the castle placed her window a great distance from the stone flags of the narrow courtyard.

A few feet from her window the left wing jutted out at right angles to the wall in which her window was built. The roof of the wing was lower than her window sill. She had often thought of the possibility of leaping across that chasm, as an act of recklessness.

As she looked at the distance now, she shuddered. The five feet distance she was capable of jumping. She would have a precarious footing, with no chance to hold herself properly for such a leap. She must balance herself on the stone sill.

She crawled out of the window, clinging to the frame. The sheer drop to the court caused

a dizziness to sweep over her. She forced her eyes on her object. The roof was edged with a low stone balustrade, the blocks of stone about a yard high and a yard apart. She would have to jump between two. Originally the stones had been arranged as part of the defense of the castle.

She forced herself not to think of the danger, to concentrate on the precise point of her landing. She had to tear her sight away from the drop below.

Iris straightened up and pressed her shoes into a firm footing on the sill, trembling violently. She leaned forward, holding with her hands. No, she couldn't do it. She relaxed, looking fearfully at the distance, the forbidding edge of the opposite roof. She saw Craig, being led in, bloody and manhandled.

Iris steeled herself. I mustn't think, she cried, I mustn't. She gauged the distance again, rose on her toes. The moment was terrifying. Simultaneously she released her grip and sprang. For one horrible moment she felt herself hurtling through space.

Then her feet scraped across the rough roof, one calf brushed against the projecting stone, her hands were clutching the tops of the stones on either side. With an impulse of fright she ran away from the edge. Quickly she crossed the roof to the heavy wooden covering of the entrance to the roof. Under this wooden covering was a steep flight of rickety stairs, leading

into the rear hall. It had once been the entrance for the castle's archers to the roof. The steps were so old, they were no longer used. Any roof festivities were held from the roof of the main building.

Iris gripped the wooden covering and pulled with all her strength. It didn't budge. In a panic she kicked it from all sides, pushed it with her slender shoulders, everything to shake it loose. Again she placed her fingers under it and leaned her whole weight on her taut arms.

Slowly the door moved, an inch, then two inches. The strain was terrific. When it reached three inches, Iris knew she could endure no more. She felt she would faint.

Holding back with her aching body, she braced her weight on one foot. The other she slid slowly under the door. Iris pressed her leather heel under the lowest point of rise. This acted as a lever. She swung slowly around, pivoting on this leg, until her shoulders were under the door. She slid under, pulling her head through.

The position was strained and Iris hurried. Supporting herself with her hands on the roof, she dangled her free foot until she found the ladder. The thigh of her extended leg was shot with sharp pains. But her weight was now solid on the ladder. She braced her lovely shoulders under the door and pushed upward. The door budged and she freed her foot, placing that on the ladder.

She let her body down slowly, the door settling into place. In the darkness she hastily climbed down the shaky ladder.

When she emerged into the hall, she felt a new Iris. Not only had she risked her life because of the man she loved, she had proved herself independent, capable of conducting herself in a crisis. A new pride, different from that of name and position, beat in her as she hurried to the drawing room. It was the pride of personal attainment. She realized that it might be little enough, but it was her first and showed her she could be self-reliant if necessary.

She needed it all when she entered the scene in the drawing room.

Iris stopped dead, controlled an outburst by the supreme effort of will. Craig, she saw, was holding himself erect by determination alone. His mouth was tight with the effort. His condition was serious, worse than she had suspected from seeing him in the court. His fine face was white as death, and glaring from it was a deep cut across his forehead, which had been freshly bleeding, and a gash on his cheek.

He wore no coat, and his shirt was tattered and bloody. His trousers were torn and splattered with blood. Keenan and his four assistants were crowding around him in a bullying fashion. Her father and mother, Tony and Athelstan were all on their feet, in belligerent attitudes when Iris entered.

They turned in unison to face her.

"Iris," thundered her father, "what are you doing here?"

She forced calmness, lightness, in her tone: "Oh, I got lonely up there."

"Iris," said her mother, "this is no place for you, when this criminal is here."

"Mother, you like detective thrillers; I like mine first hand."

Tony said: "I thought the family had thrown you in durance vile."

"Oh," said Iris, "I did the fifth installment of a Pearl White serial, leaping from window to roof."

"Good girl," Tony said.

Mr. Wyndham shouted: "You must be mad. You can't come in here."

"The fact is, father, I am here. I think it unkind I be excluded from family reunions."

Mr. Wyndham stared at her, then turned away to Keenan. "Well, let's settle this thing. You have the word of your men that they caught this fellow trying to escape from the estate."

"Yes, sir. He was wandering through Huntington woods. Apparently he had had some kind of accident, falling down or something, and had lost his way."

"I see no reason then for wasting more time with this fellow. Have him arrested, Keenan."

"Mr. Wyndham," said Craig, "you will not be pleased when this story breaks. It would make

a much better newspaper yarn that I was pushed from the summer house by the Duke of Athelstan, than that an accident had befallen me."

"Who," snorted the duke, "would regard such a fantastic tale?"

"The reporters, certainly. It isn't plausible that a gardener who knew the grounds familiarly should wander for a night and a day looking for a way from the estate, even if he should have an accident. It is more logical that he should be stunned from his assault, and wander in semidelirium."

"Is it plausible," the duke sneered, "that I should be able to cause you, who have previously demonstrated your brutal strength, such an injury?"

"It would be, if they knew the facts. That, catching me unaware, you pushed me over the balustrade. When you drop thirty feet down a rocky cliff you gather a number of injuries."

"This guy is crazy, Mr. Wyndham," Keenan said. "If the Duke of Athelstan had pushed him over, it don't stand to reason that he would leave him to come back and tell about it."

"The point is," Craig said, "I fell into the stream. His highness did not see me rise, he thought I was drowned. By luck I was revived under water, swam under to the far side, and came up in the bushes lining the far side."

Mr. Wyndham snorted impatiently. "Enough of this tommyrot. Those things do not happen

on the Wyndham Manor. You are nothing but a troublemaker and—”

“He’s probably some fiendish kind of anarchist,” interrupted Mrs. Wyndham.

“A troublemaker,” continued Mr. Wyndham, “and a criminal. If you can prove you did not steal the bracelet, I’m willing to face a suit for false arrest.”

“He’ll have a record, sir,” suggested Bryant. “We’ll find he has somebody on the outside he’s working with.”

Iris heard these accusations with conflicting emotions. Everything pointed against him, yet a conviction triumphed over all facts that the man she loved was innocent.

“When,” she said suddenly, “does Craig say Athelstan threw him over the cliff?”

“Around seven o’clock yesterday,” drawled the duke. “Absurd, because I left the tennis matches at six. I dressed for dinner and came down before dinner was served, at seven-thirty.”

Iris knew this to be true. She was silenced for a moment. Mr. Wyndham said: “Go ahead, Keenan. Take him away.”

Keenan’s four henchmen eagerly grabbed Craig. Something burst forth in Iris. She rushed forward: “You can’t drag an injured man away like this, without a trial.”

“Iris, control yourself,” said her father. “What is this man to you?”

She faced each person in the room, intent on

her answer. She saw Craig try to check her. She said: "I love him."

"The girl is mad," shrieked Mrs. Wyndham.

"Go to your room," shouted her father. "You have disgraced us enough already. Take the man away, Keenan."

Keenan and his assistants started to drag Craig from the room.

Iris rushed forward: "Stop, stop! You can't treat him like that. Tony," she pleaded, "don't let them."

"Wait a minute, fellows," Tony said. "I think, father, you're being a bit harsh. If Iris does happen to love the fellow—"

"It is impossible that my daughter should love a gardener. The man has her bewitched."

"I remember," cried her mother, "Iris was always taking his part."

"Jove," said Athelstan, "this is a bally mess. To have a gardener for a rival."

"You'll have to excuse her, Athelstan," Mr. Wyndham said, "she is not herself."

"I am myself for the first time in my life. I demand the right to love the man I want."

"There's something in that," Tony said.

"What do you know of love?" Mr. Wyndham said. "She's a silly romantic girl and she needs to be brought to her senses. We'll arrange to take her abroad."

"Craig can follow me," she said.

"Craig," said her father, "will be hatching up

another scheme in jail. We have enough on him to hang him. Haven't we, Keenan?"

"Not that exactly, sir, but we can get him a long stretch."

"Oh, Anthony," shrilled Mrs. Wyndham, "why should we stay here, talking of hanging and stretches. Please have him removed. He always depressed me. And with Iris behaving in this ridiculous fashion, I don't think we should have the servants around."

"Ma'am," said Patterson, "I'm not a servant. I'm a private detective."

"Yes, my good man," said Mr. Wyndham, "quite right. But I wish you would cease heeding other people and execute my orders. *Take this man away!*"

"I shall never get used to this country," wailed the duke. "The daughters love the gardeners, the menials have conferences with the family, and contradict you for calling them servants. Egad, a silly place."

"You will be calm, if you please," said Wyndham. "This is an unpleasant experience for us all. It'll soon be settled."

"Not the way you think," Iris flared. "I'll never marry that man. I will love the man I want in spite of you all."

"I'm with you, Iris," Tony said.

Mr. Wyndham shouted: "Do you hear me, Keenan, or do I have to send to New York for

a police force? Will you take that man away for arrest!"

"Excuse me, sir. Come on, you."

Craig jerked himself forward. "Take your dirty hands off me. I've had enough of this farce. I won't sue you for false arrest, Wyndham. I'll make you ridiculous in every newspaper in this country and abroad. Give those fools the word to let me pass."

The roomful of people stared at him in amazement. Iris knew that every one of them had felt as she did: an imperious command. It was the voice and gesture of a personage, a man of authority. The five burly guards had instinctively drawn back at the dominance in the voice.

Mrs. Wyndham was the first to recover. "What do you mean by addressing my husband as 'Wyndham'?"

"Because he addresses me as Craig."

The older woman looked aghast. Athelstan had grown very pale. He stepped forward nervously: "Are you insane? Throw the person out."

"Throw him out," Mr. Wyndham ordered, "we'll settle it later."

The five men overpowered the injured man. Iris rushed forward: "Craig! Craig!" she cried.

Her father restrained her. "Do you want to make the family a laughing stock?" he thundered.

"Don't, Iris," said Craig. They muffled his

mouth. As they opened the door to drag him out, Bowles appeared. He looked puzzled.

"What is it?" Mr. Wyndham snapped.

"Beg pardon, sir, but a Miss Spottswood, of Virginia, wishes to see—er—Craig, sir."

"Tell her to wait."

"Wait, father," cried Iris. "She has an important bearing on the affair. I'm sure she can clear everything up."

"Don't let her in!" cried the duke.

There was such panic in his unexpected remark that they stared at him.

"Please let her in," Iris pleaded. "I'll ask nothing else if you do."

"Send Miss Spottswood in," conceded her father. "Bring the man back."

They ushered Craig into the corner of the room.

Judith Spottswood walked slowly into the room. She was typical of the Southern debutante, blonde, feminine, and soft. She was charmingly dressed in clinging blue chiffon which accentuated her languorous figure. The texture of her lovely face was almost startling in its perfection, and her assurance was of the kind developed by generations of Virginia aristocrats.

Mr. Wyndham saw immediately he was meeting an equal. He stepped forward with his distinguished courtesy. "I am grateful for this

honor," he said. "I am Anthony Wyndham. Of what service can I be to you?"

Iris stood transfixed. On the wrist of the girl was the engagement bracelet of the House of Athelstan.

"I am looking for my fiancé," she drawled, glancing around the room.

Her eyes lighted on Craig. They dilated, she gasped.

"Dean," she cried, rushing to him. She threw her arms around his neck. Craig gently placed his hands on her shoulders.

"This man—*your* fiancé?" Mr. Wyndham stared, incredulous.

"Of course, he is—or was." She drew back to look at him.

"I beg your pardon, but will you be good enough to explain this?" Mr. Wyndham said.

"Why . . . for months I have been engaged to the Duke of Athelstan. He went away, because of . . . he went away and I was worried and came to New York two days ago to make inquiries. This morning I saw in the newspaper that he had announced his engagement with a Miss Wyndham, presenting her with the Athelstan bracelet. I have the bracelet." She displayed it. "I came for explanations. . . . Now . . . I don't understand this."

Mr. Wyndham looked at the bracelet. He whirled on the duke. "I demand an explanation, Athelstan," he said ominously.

The duke was pale. He drew back from Mr. Wyndham's words, wetting his lips.

Judith Spottswood said bewilderedly: "But he is not the Duke of Athelstan."

"What?"

"No!"

"Who is he?"

Iris had a sinking feeling of premonition. She looked toward Craig. Their eyes met. He looked straight at her, like a man facing death. He compressed his lips. With an air of grim determination he strode forward. He said:

"I am Dean Craig Cameron, Duke of Athelstan."

CHAPTER XIX

IRIS felt as though she had been struck. Craig, the gardener, the seventh Duke of Athelstan . . . Dean *Craig* Cameron. It was wild, unbelievable. Yet it explained everything about him, his classic features, his proud bearing, his social grace. . . . His riding Prince Hal. . . . Athelstan, the famous polo player. The man who remembered him as the eight goal Southerner. Sheila Langfort, who remembered having seen him at Monte Carlo. Her father thinking he had seen him somewhere. She hardly heard the questions flying around her.

"Then who are you?" Mr. Wyndham demanded of the supposed duke.

"I am Mark Lowry, the steward-secretary of the Athelstans."

"How is it you two didn't know each other?" demanded Keenan suspiciously. This was too much for him.

"We have never met," said Craig, now Dean Craig Cameron. "I was in America when he was engaged by my attorneys to supervise the estate."

"Fancy," said Mrs. Wyndham, "our assistant gardener being a duke."

Tony stepped forward, offering his hand. "Charmed to make your acquaintance, I always thought you a swell fellow."

Craig smiled. "It is my pleasure, I'm sure."

Mr. Wyndham cleared his throat. "Ah—Athelstan," he addressed his former gardener, "would you be good enough to explain all this? How did the bracelet get to Miss Spottswood and how do you happen to be in this anomalous position?"

"Yeah," Keenan cut in. "I'd like some explanations."

The Duke of Athelstan glanced toward him, included the room in his charming smile. "Miss Spottswood had done me the honor of consenting to be my wife and I had sent for my secretary to bring the bracelet over to present to her. I was going away on a little vacation."

"How did you happen to be here as gardener?"

"That was the vacation," he replied.

"Tell it correctly, Dean," Judith Spottswood said. "The Duke of Athelstan had become thoroughly Americanized—or almost."

They exchanged smiles of understanding which shot a pang through Iris. They had intimacies together, shared lives. "How does that happen?" demanded Keenan, the suspicious.

"Well, when he was a little boy," Judith began, "he was sent to visit cousins in Virginia."

"Judith . . ." he protested.

"Please go on." Iris for the first time ad-

dressed the Southern girl. The girl raised her dark eyes and their glances met. Iris did not feel hostility; she felt a contact, a tragic understanding in that glance.

Judith said: "His mother had died and his father wanted to be alone for a while . . . I guess his son caused him sad memories."

Dean Craig Cameron stirred uncomfortably. Judith saw the people were hanging on her words, and continued: "The war broke out, and his father, who was an infantry colonel, went to France. The relatives were afraid for the child to cross the Atlantic with the submarine attack, and afraid of the attack on London. He went to school in America and was prepared for an American university."

"What's that got to do with the bracelet?" snorted Keenan.

Judith Spottswood hesitated. "I know nothing about the bracelet," she said. "I can only tell you about my—fiancé."

She raised her eyes to Iris. Iris lifted her head slightly: "We want to know," she said, "about your—fiancé."

"Toward the end of the war," Judith continued, "his father was killed. After all had been settled he returned to England to enter Magdalen, Oxford. I guess he found that his boyhood friends had grown up differently than he and his . . . best friends were in America."

"My best *friend*," Athelstan interrupted. "I

had lived near Miss Spottswood . . . we rather grew up together . . . and she was awfully kind to me, a strange child in a strange land. When I returned to England, I was lonely for her. I returned and entered the University of Virginia, from which I was graduated."

"Ah-ha," Tony said. "That's where Covington Wright saw you play polo. Remember, Iris, he recognized Craig—er—the Duke of Athelstan, but couldn't remember the name."

"The Duke of Athelstan," Judith said, "rarely used his title. He was Dean Cameron. He was growing completely American, had accepted it as his country."

"But," said Cameron, "not enough for Miss Spottswood. She wanted me to be able to earn my own living. Not to be an empty title. I told her I could earn it anyway. Hence I became your gardener, or rather, assistant."

"But," protested Keenan, "what about the bracelet?"

Mark Lowry, alias the Duke of Athelstan, looked uneasy.

"Oh," said Craig, "I had forgotten. Upon my launching forth as a son of the soil Miss Spottswood accepted me. I sent for my secretary to deliver the bracelet in person. Apparently he brought it here instead. I wrote to Miss Spottswood once, asking her if she had received it."

"Why didn't you know this impostor had it

with him?" Mr. Wyndham asked, scowling fiercely at Lowry.

"You see, I didn't know he was my secretary. I told you my house was run by a group of trusted old servants, and a steward-secretary appointed by my solicitors. I met the former secretary, but this chap was appointed after my last trip to England."

"Did Miss Spottswood say she had received the bracelet?"

"I never received an answer."

"I wrote you," Judith said.

"I guess that was after we started holding your mail," Keenan said. "We had no legal authority to open it. We just sort of delayed it."

"I see. Just after I wrote, this chap presented Iris with the bracelet. Then I did get worried and tried to send a wire, which failed."

"I did receive the bracelet," Judith said, "after I had written you I hadn't. I was surprised that it was sent in a registered letter."

"Ah," said Keenan, rubbing his hands. "Who sent it?" He looked at Craig still hoping to pin something on him.

"Who did?" said Mr. Wyndham, looking at the secretary.

"I did," he admitted sullenly.

"Why?"

"In a moment of infatuation I had given Iris—Miss Wyndham—the bracelet," he said brazenly. "I was immediately frightened. I

removed it from the safe and mailed it off. I tried to throw suspicion on his highness because I knew he distrusted me and I feared he had information he could use against me."

"What was your game?" Keenan couldn't be quite as hard as he wanted to be. He was still intimidated by the man he had thought to be a duke.

"I refuse to be questioned in this manner," Lowry said defiantly. "I refer you to my attorneys."

"Quite right," his master said. "But listen, we're not trying to incriminate you. It'll be much better for you if you help us get this straight than if you force us to bring charges and answer the questions of a prosecuting attorney. You have my word, they're much worse than anything at Old Bailey."

"Well," Lowry said, "persons visiting the Athelstan Castle frequently mistook me for the duke. The Wyndhams had heard from some of these persons that the Duke of Athelstan was at home. They had letters to him from Lord and Lady Cavanaugh. You remember, sir . . ." He unconsciously fell into the manner of his position in addressing his master.

The duke nodded.

"I posed as the duke and they suggested I visit them if I came to America. Shortly afterwards I received the summons to bring over the bracelet. I remembered the Wyndhams and I fan-

cied they wanted to marry their daughter to the nobility."

"How dare you?" shouted the head of the house of Wyndham.

"The insolent upstart," Mrs. Wyndham said.

Mark Lowry gave an insolent smile. "So," he said, "I cabled them from the boat. Naturally I told them Mark Lowry and explained that I traveled incognito."

"That's the reason you were so particular about keeping the story of the Duke of Athelstan being in Wyndham Manor out of the papers," Mr. Wyndham said angrily.

"Exactly." Lowry realized his little game was over and he tried to retain a bold appearance, which his voice belied. "I knew if the real Athelstan saw newspaper stories it would be unfortunate for me."

"But," insisted Keenan, "what was your racket? What'd you expect to get from it?"

"Oh, a hasty marriage, and then a settlement from the wealthy Americans to keep it secret."

He looked at Iris, who flushed with indignation and scorn. His light manner changed. "My undoing was Iris herself. Had I not become so genuinely infatuated, I should not have presented the bracelet."

Mr. Wyndham retained his indignation at Craig. "But why didn't you do something when you knew this person was posing as you?"

"I was rather amused. I didn't suspect his

actual identity until he gave the bracelet, then I wasn't sure. I did protect Iris from any entanglements."

He looked at her and in the exchange of glances Iris read that was not the only reason for his interrupting that all-fated elopement.

"What shall we do with the impostor?" demanded Mr. Wyndham.

Craig hesitated. "If you don't mind, I'd rather he be released without pressing charges. It'd be easier for us all."

Keenan didn't like that. He looked disapprovingly at his henchmen. They scowled. They didn't understand this proceeding. It had taken turns which left them baffled.

"Tell me," said Tony to Craig, "why did you pick on us for your demonstration of manhood?"

"Oh, I drifted North because I was too well known in the South. I finally selected this place because I thought with its size and management I wouldn't be subjected to petty tyranny from the *nouveau riche*. I never imagined I would stand up under that very well."

His amused glance met Iris'. Instantly the amusement faded into the serious look with which he lately regarded her. Now, in that glance, which spoke more than words, was a sadness.

Iris felt no longer the barrier which could be removed between them. She saw this as the

man she loved and who loved her, fitted in every way to be the husband approved by her family, but with a barrier stronger than all she had felt that memorable night in the car. This was a barrier of personal duty. She didn't know the extent of his love for Judith Spottswood.

When Judith turned her warm gaze to him and he met her gaze, Iris saw nothing of the passion which fired his eyes when he regarded her. They looked at each other with a companionable understanding. It was a glance such as Tony exchanged with her.

Mr. Wyndham said: "Well . . . it seems a genuinely unfortunate affair. I'm sorry . . . for everything. Shall we go?" He turned to his wife.

"Imagine," she said, "a duke working as our gardener."

"Assistant," said Craig.

Mrs. Wyndham wasn't sure of that remark. She left grandly on the arm of her husband.

The remainder of the group stood with restraint. The sudden descent of futility on Iris seemed to pervade the whole room. Tony knew it. Craig was caught up in it. Judith Spottswood had felt from the first some intimacy she had interrupted. The guardians were aware of the atmosphere and she shifted uncomfortably.

"Well," Tony said, "I don't think I'll be in at the killing. Hope to see you later, Athelstan. Charmed, Miss Spottswood." He bowed himself

out. At the door he looked interrogatively at Iris.

Iris did not reply to the question in his eyes. He closed the door, leaving her alone with the two. She wanted to leave. There was no reason to remain. To-morrow she could offer polite congratulations. To-night it was impossible. This one man, of all in her life, she had given her lips, surrendered her love. Now, he was going away with another woman. The woman she had feared, even before admitting her love for Craig.

There was nothing she could do. Only some force, stronger than reason, held her. The men were waiting for a word of authority. Miss Spottswood and Craig were waiting. . . . Iris would display no faltering, not show her hurt.

"You may go," she said to the men.

They shuffled from the room. The three were left alone. A current drew them together, held them in a tense atmosphere. She was standing in front of the French windows. Iris fumbled with the latch, determined to leave.

She looked up, meeting the eyes of Craig . . . now the Duke of Athelstan. They hung, for the briefest moment. To her it was an eternity. She read their fates in his eyes. She knew from the despair and longing in his eyes he was fulfilling the duties of a gentleman.

That revelation stabbed her. She dropped her hand from the latch and turned her face away from them with a stricken look.

CHAPTER XX

JUDITH SPOTTSWOOD saw that stricken look. She looked at Craig. His heart was in his eyes. Everything in him yearned toward this tall princess who stood at the window. A lump came in her throat. Craig had never had that look in his eyes for her. Weak as he was, tattered, beaten in body but not in spirit, Craig was a fit mate for Iris Wyndham. Craig had forgotten her. His eyes held Iris Wyndham in his arms. Judith saw that.

Like a man in a daze, Craig started for Iris "Miss Wyndham," he choked. "Miss Wyndham. . . ."

"Yes?" Iris said, without turning.

"I . . . I'll say good-by and thank you. . . ."

Judith stepped forward. "Craig," she said, "I'll wait downstairs in the car for you."

She saw the relief flood into his eyes. He took her hand and pressed it. "Thank you, Judy," he said huskily. "I . . . I will be right down."

Judith looked at Iris Wyndham. "Good-by," she said.

"Good-by, Miss S-Spottswood."

Judith went out and closed the door. Craig stood there for a moment. Iris turned and looked

at him. "Good-by, Craig," she said. "I . . . I'm sorry to see you go. I hope you'll be happy."

Everything was over. Everything. The world had stopped. Time had stopped. She was a dazed thing standing there waiting for it to start again. It never would. It never could. Craig . . . Craig . . . another woman waiting for you.

Craig said, low voiced, "Iris . . . are we going to say good-by this way?"

"How else can we say it?"

"Iris, look at me."

"I am looking at you."

"You're looking through me, my darling. Give me your eyes."

Her eyes met his. They clung and held like a woman drowning. She set her lips. Craig's hands trembled away from his sides. "Iris . . . you're not blaming me?"

She shook her head silently. "I'm not blaming you. I'm loving you."

"Iris!" Her name was torn from him. His face twisted and she was afraid that the tears would come to his eyes. She must prevent that.

"Craig," she said, "we've nothing to . . . to regret. We loved each other for a time, and now you are going to be married. It happens every day. We mustn't . . . mustn't let it color our lives. Be as happy as you can and I'll . . . I'll be as happy as I can."

"Happy?" he said. "Happy, without you,

Iris? You're all the happiness in the world. You hold in your hands the highest heaven I could reach. Without you, there isn't such a thing as happiness."

"Craig . . . please!"

"I know," he said bitterly, "you're thinking I'm disloyal . . . but Iris, is there such a thing as disloyalty in this sort of love? Judith is like my sister. I thought I loved her . . . now I know that I loved her as a sister. We drifted into the engagement. I did love her. I do love her. But you . . . you are my wife. Iris, give me some little thing to carry away with me."

"I'll give you this. I love you. I will never love any one else. Wherever you are, my heart is. Wherever I am, I will be thinking of you. Whenever I see a beautiful moonlight night, I will be sharing it with you. I will follow the inner voice, Craig. The end of the road may not lead to you, but I will remember that you wanted me to. You have set me free from Wyndham Manor."

"Free to marry some one else," he groaned, "while I long for you, Iris. . . ."

"Don't," she gasped. "Craig . . . you are merciless."

"I am starving," he said huskily. "Starving, Iris."

"She is waiting for you."

"I know. I will spend the rest of my life with her. I have this moment with you. Look at me, my sweet. Let me carry something of you away."

Let me remember your eyes, your hair, your . . . your smile. No, don't smile, Iris, I couldn't bear it."

"And I couldn't smile," she said.

"I want you to believe me when I say that I . . . I didn't mean to mess things up this way. I thought there might be a way out of this infernal mess. I meant to go and see Judith . . . her appearance to-day settles that. There is nothing I can do."

"She is beautiful, Craig. She is sweet. Make her happy for my sake."

"Iris, were you ever afraid of going mad?"

"Yes," she said, but she didn't tell him that she feared it most at this moment.

"You know how I feel?"

"Yes, Craig."

"You know that I would tear my heart out to know that you belonged to me for . . . for five blessed moments?"

"Craig, I can't . . . can't go on. You'll have to go."

"I'm rooted here. I can't go. It will be like closing the door on the sun when I go. Spare me another moment, my darling."

"You *must* go. I can't *stand* it."

"Iris . . ." his eyes caught and held hers once more. "I can't go without holding you in my arms." He held his arms out to her. She closed her eyes, shook her head.

"No, Craig." Her voice was faint and very far away.

As from a distance, she heard his voice saying tenderly, "Then I will come to you, Iris."

His arms went around her and time started again. The world was once more in motion. Her head sank to his shoulder and their lips met. Iris' arms crept up and held his mouth close to hers. His grasp tightened on her until she could scarcely breathe. She did not mind. She had one moment, Judith had a lifetime. She began to sob wildly. "Craig . . . Craig . . . oh, my darling, how can I give you up? How can I watch you drive away forever?"

"How can I drive away forever?" he asked. "How can I let you give me up? There's nothing left for either of us. Oh, Iris, my beautiful, my sweet . . . what have we done to deserve it? Have we done anything?"

A golden-haired girl in the courtyard was staring at the shiny surface of a polished steering wheel. She had looked up once and turned her eyes away quickly. Iris was in Craig's arms. Judith bit her lip and swallowed hard. Her eyes traveled to the bracelet upon her arm. "A crown won by love," she murmured. She slipped from the roadster and went up the steps of the Manor slowly. A moment later, she ran down the steps again and climbed in the car, blinded by tears.

Craig was saying softly, "Iris, my love . . . let me . . . let me give you a replica of the

Athelstan bracelet in pearls. Will you? I want you to wear it. I want to know that you have my crown won by love. I won't see you. I promise that I won't attempt to see you. I will send it with my love."

"I couldn't. I couldn't bear it."

"Iris . . . my Iris . . ."

"Craig, my dear . . ." Iris held him close for a moment and then pushed him from her gently. "Judith is waiting," she said.

Craig went to the door. He leaned his head against the door jamb for a moment. "I can't face her, Iris. I can't face her."

"You must, my darling. She is not to blame."

He turned and looked at her. She hesitated a moment and then flew into his arms. He kissed her again. "Iris," he said brokenly, "we hadn't done anything. Why must we go through this? It's a funny system. . . ."

"Keep her happy, Craig," she whispered.

"You won't forget me. Promise you won't forget me."

"Could I forget that the sun is in heaven?"

"Precious thing," he said with his face twisting again. "Precious Iris. . . ."

"You won't forget me, Craig," she said. It was a statement, not an interrogation. In answer, he caught her in his arms once more and held her there. His eyes were closed. He put her away from him gently and opened the door. She stood trembling. When that door closed, he

was gone from her life. It was incredible. Life without Craig . . . life without love. She could not believe it. She would not cry. She could not cry. It was too deep for tears.

She saw the back of his tattered shirt and her hands went out in a pitiful gesture. Just to touch it . . . just to feel her hands on it . . . just to touch something that had touched him. He was going down the stairs. Slowly, with dragging footsteps. She cried out, "Craig!" and stifled the cry with her two hands pressed tightly over her mouth. Going away forever . . . going to Judith. This time the cry was not stifled. It came out and echoed through the stately halls. "Craig . . . *Craig!*"

He came back to her in three bounds, caught her in his arms. She quivered and stiffened. "Coward," she said. "I'm a coward, Craig. I can't bear to see . . . you go. I'm stealing one last moment. Go quickly. I'm ready now."

He released her and went down the stairs again. He did not look back. She knew it was because he could not bear to. She clutched at the door to hold herself up. Sinking . . . sinking . . . the floor coming up to meet her. She was whispering, "Craig," over and over. The man she loved was going away from her at this moment. She said it to herself as though she were teaching herself a lesson. He was going away. He did not want to go away, but he had to. He loved her. He would marry another

woman, but he loved her. The floor was very near. She set her teeth. She must not faint. It would be a silly thing to do. *She must not faint.* Some one would come in and find her lying there, with her face turned up to the ceiling.

She realized, dimly, that she was clinging to the doorknob. An eternity must have passed. She struggled to her feet and pushed her hair back from her eyes. No, an eternity had not passed. She could hear Craig's voice in the reception hall.

Almost unconsciously, she started for it. One last glimpse of him . . . no one could begrudge her that. One last glimpse of him driving away with another woman. She wanted to laugh at that. A woman who wanted to see her lover driving away with another woman was rather ridiculous. She tried to laugh, but it turned out to be a sob. Iris Wyndham sobbing.

Iris Wyndham staggering downstairs. That was ridiculous too. She had had lessons in descending those stairs. They had sent her downstairs with heavy books on her head, to insure her carriage. Now she stumbled down as any ordinary woman would stumble downstairs to see her lover driving away with another woman. She was sobbing, but she did not know that. Women very often sob without knowing it.

Craig was there . . . just there in the reception hall. He was staring at Bowles. Bowles was staring straight ahead. A glittering thing

hung over his finger. It was the Athelstan bracelet. Judith Spottswood had lost her bracelet and Bowles had found it. Iris tried to collect herself.

She went over to Bowles. "Miss Spottswood," she said. "You must take that . . ." she indicated the bracelet, "to Miss Spottswood. She is waiting in the car outside. Good-by, Craig. Good luck." The words stuck in her throat. What was she saying? She was wishing Craig luck.

Craig said gently, "Iris . . . Bowles has a message for you."

"Yes," she said, "Bowles always has some sort of message for me. He can give it to me after he takes Miss Spottswood the bracelet."

"It's about the bracelet, Iris."

"About the bracelet?"

"Miss Spottswood," Bowles said, stiffly, staring straight ahead, "asked me to give you this. She asked me to tell you that it belongs to you."

He handed her the bracelet, hooked it over her finger as it had been hooked over his. She stood there holding it. Bowles went away. Iris looked at Craig. "What does he mean?"

"He means that Judith has gone away, Iris."

"Gone . . . away?"

"She has gone away. She left you the Athelstan bride bracelet, Iris. She said it belonged to you. Look at me, my dearest. Can't you look at me?"

Iris reached out for something to hold to. Her

fingers fumbled and found Craig's arm. "You mean she's left for good?"

"For good," he said tenderly. He reached down and held her trembling little body straight. She wanted to crumple.

"Iris, my darling," he said, "will you wear my bride bracelet?"

"Do you mean . . . that Judith has gone away because she is not going to marry you?"

"Judith has gone away because she is a wonderful girl and she realizes that I love *you*."

"Then you're mine?"

"And you are mine," he said.

"Craig . . . I can't believe . . ."

His hands were touching her arm, lifting her wrist. He clasped something cold around it, and drew her wrist to his lips. "*Ab Amore Corona*," he murmured, "A Crown won by Love. Iris . . . my darling. . . ."

"Craig," she whispered, lifting her lips, "help me to be worthy of it."

THE END



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